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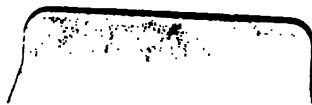
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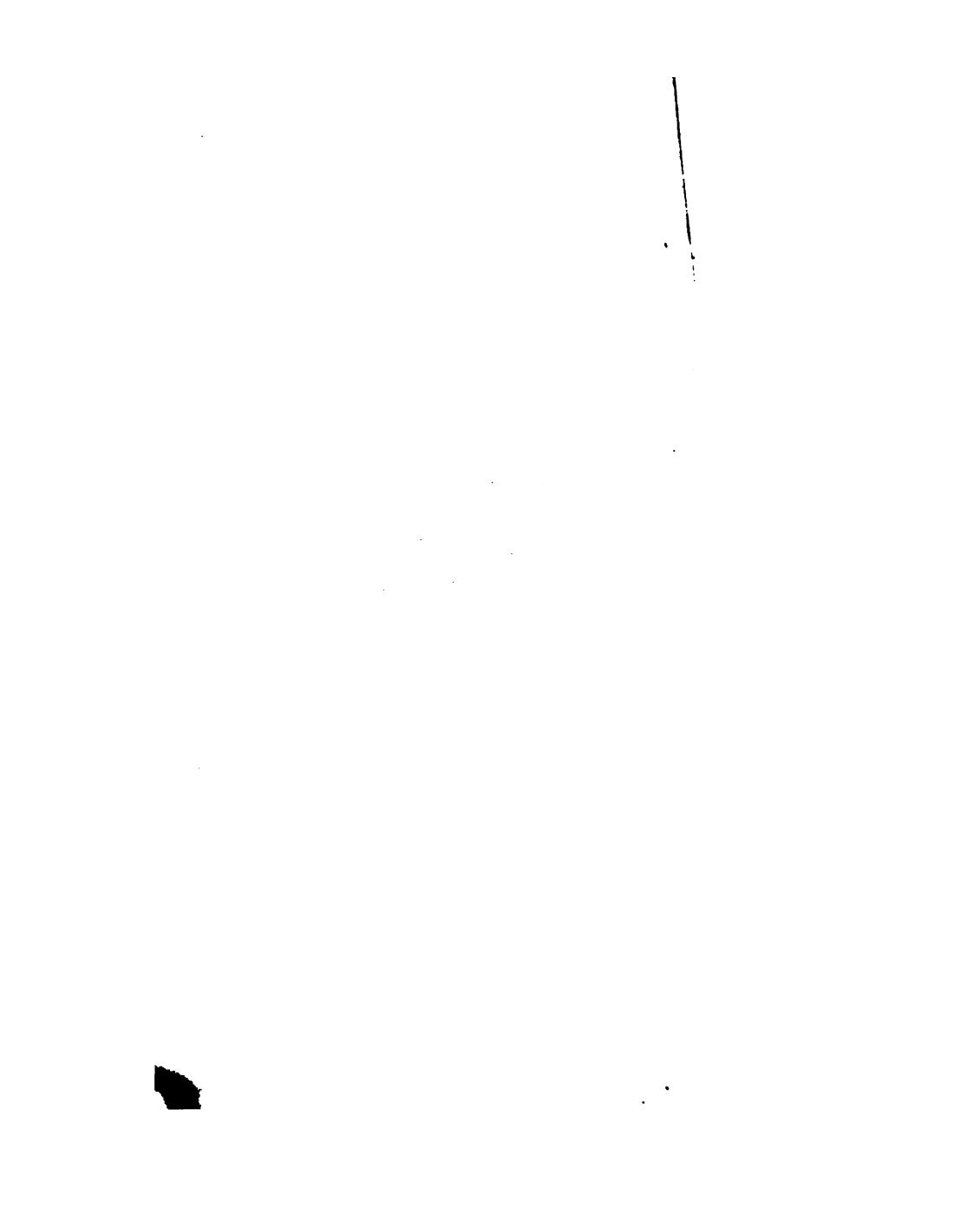
JAMES NEWTON BASKETT



Hittin, Amercan



10



"AT YOU-ALL'S HOUSE"



“AT YOU-ALL’S HOUSE”

A Missouri Nature Story

BY

JAMES NEWTON BASKETT
AUTHOR OF “THE STORY OF THE BIRDS”

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
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1898

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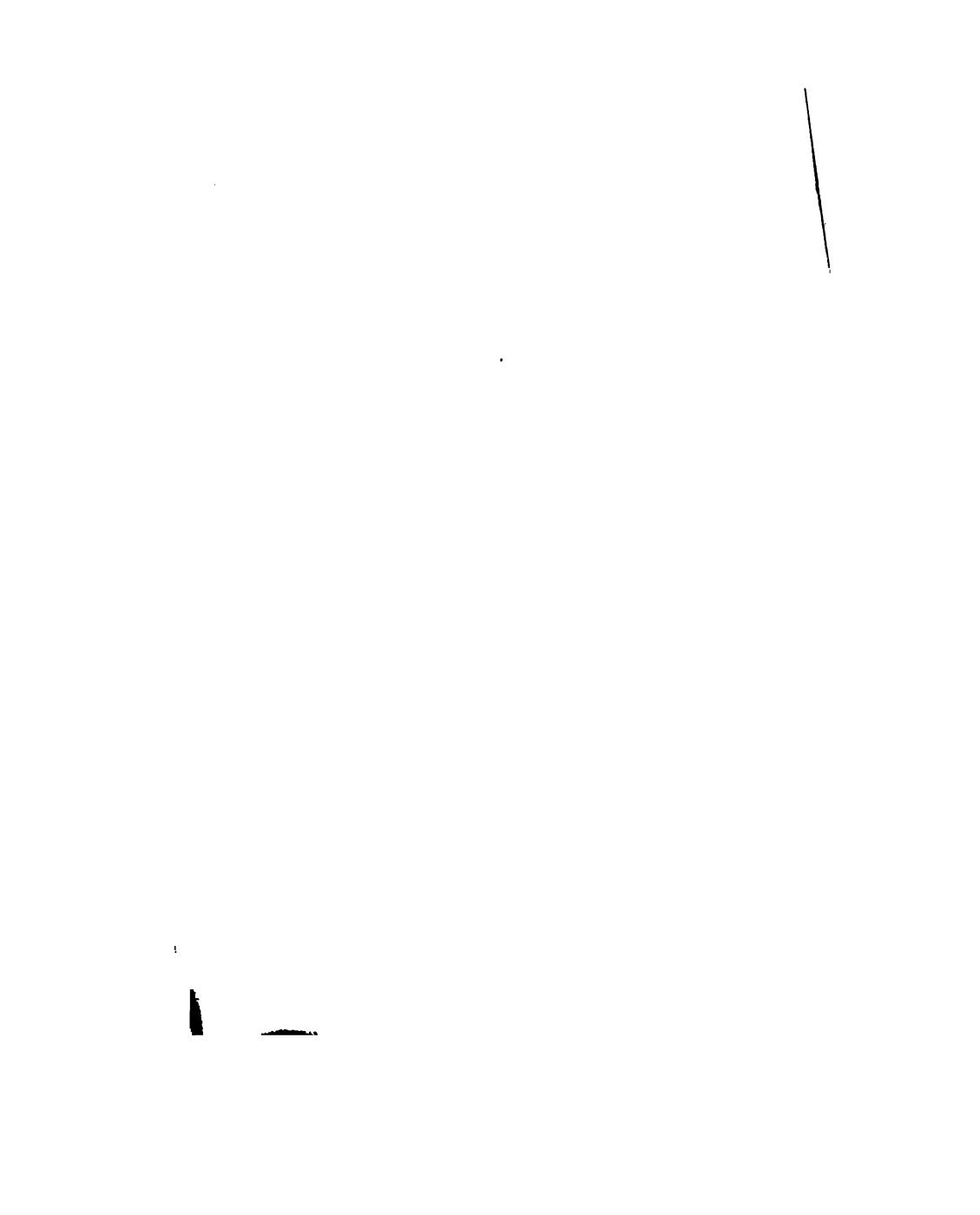
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TO THE MEMORY OF

My Father

A MISSOURI FARMER

,
,



APOLOGY

“ANXIOUS Nature sometimes reflects in pools and puddles the objects which our grovelling senses may fail to see relieved against the sky.”

“The heavens and the earth are one flower: the earth the calyx, the heavens the corolla.”

“Only what is thought or said at certain rare coincidences is good. I would not be one of those who will foolishly drive a nail into mere lathing and plaster. Give me a hammer and let me feel for the furrowing.”

THOREAU.

“There is one more help which we cannot do without—the help of wild fair Nature.”

RUSKIN.

“Thought is the property of him who can entertain it, and of him who can adequately use it.”

EMERSON.

J. N. B.

Mexico, Mo., September, 1897.

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INTRODUCTION

READERS of American short stories have had the opportunity, during the last twenty years, of becoming acquainted with many of the most interesting and charming sections of the country. The landscape of New England, of the Middle States, of Virginia, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Minnesota, California, Iowa, Kansas, and, more recently, of Oregon, has been sketched with genuine pictorial skill by a group of writers of fiction who have known intimately and sympathetically the country and people they have described. The scenery and life of Missouri have so far remained unsketched; and yet both are rich in color and human interest. The flora of the section is especially varied and beautiful, the region happily combining

the characteristic qualities of northern and southern natural life, enriching the sober tones of the one, and subduing the excessive richness of the other. In this region life has, for various reasons, developed distinct types of character and habits of thought. Into this fresh field the writer of this story has ventured in the hope that, by the faithful presentation of a boy's life on a Missouri farm, the rural charm of the section and the quality and peculiarities of its natural life may be truthfully reported. The large place which Nature, and what may be called natural incident, fill in the story will not surprise readers who are accustomed, in contemporary fiction, to the constant introduction of landscape, not only as a background but also as the key to manners, habits, and ideals.

The difference between Miss Jewett's New England farmer and Miss Murfree's Tennessee mountaineer cannot be explained unless one takes into account those differences of natural environment which, in the end, find expression in moral and social conditions.

Mr. Baskett has run the thread of the love story told in these pages through rural experiences of many kinds, in the hope of bringing before the imagination the world of Missouri farm life, and of illustrating some of those ways of human helpfulness which make for the increase of knowledge as well as of happiness. In such a study the imagination cannot rest in the mere knowledge of natural facts, but passes on to those ultimate ideas which not only ennable but interpret human life. If, in this process, Nature becomes more spiritual and comprehensible, faith in the great spiritual verities will be deepened without the loss of any element of interest from the story.

HAMILTON W. MABIE.

AT YOU-ALL'S HOUSE

CHAPTER I

"Our horizons are never quite at our elbows."

— THOREAU.

"The bird of life is singing on the bough
His two eternal notes of I and Thou."

— LE GALLIENNE.

THEY did not fully recognize each other till they met squarely at the intersection of the roads, though each had seen the other's figure flitting between the branches of the hedge as they neared the crossing. He was in his "shirt sleeves," and wore an old chip hat that slouched over his eyes, and she had on a sunbonnet that fell in an invertebrate fold over her face. Each knew the horse that the other rode, however, and began to pull on the snaffle bit, in the hope that the other might pass first into the main highway and be gone. But before any effect could be wrought upon the hard mouths, it was too late. The courtesies of even such a plight and position as this would not any

longer tolerate the feint of non-recognition. So the boy shifted the double-trees, that were on his shoulder, round a little, and said,—

“How *air* you?” and he threw up the flap of his hat till it rested square across his brow. The girl lifted with her left arm, on which a brass kettle swung, the fold of bonnet from her left eye, and, glancing shyly out, said,—

“Howdy!”

There was the consciousness in the manner and flush of each that they had met a little out of season; for on Sundays they had often seen each other at church, upon different steeds with different panoplies, and with different—very different—costumes for the riders. The boys rode upon the right side of the girls then, which was the *right* side indeed; but now as the two “nags” came respectively into the two paths, which the constant passing of the double teams had made, his right knee brushed her feet embarrassingly; so that he pulled his mare backward slowly, to pass behind and take the place demanded by equestrian etiquette. As he did so, one of the dangling single-trees caught a hook into the wire handle of Dolly’s kettle, and, with a clatter, jerked it from her arm.



Her horse darted forward at the clash, and the boy's mare sprang backward, bringing his hat-flap again over his eyes so that he could not see the girl's fate; but he felt all sorts of things, and cursed himself and "old Sal" for the awkwardness of the situation.

Both horses were old, and, on ordinary occasions, unusually gentle. The appearance alone of a brass kettle or a jingling mass of single-trees and double-trees was not frightful to either; but their sudden mid-air combination was beyond equine comprehension. Hence when the breeze had again caught his hat-flap, and he had realized himself as doing anything at all voluntary, Shan was driving — with heavy thumps — the heels of his plough shoes into the sides of old Sal to prevent her from shying further away from the dangling kettle, and Dolly was slapping the neck of old Bill with the surplus ends of her reins to make him approach it.

It was the long lane together from this on till their ways parted. The hope that each held, that the other might hurry on, had now vanished; for the boy's working pants had a patch which the bare back of old Sal did not wholly

hide, and the girl, besides realizing a sort of general dishevelment from her shaking up, felt sure that the placket of her skirt behind was gaping badly above the rim of her saddle.

"Father made a crab-apple drag this morning," said the boy, after a long silence. "Mr. Johnson allers mashes his laprings down, or I needn't ter brought these swingle-trees. We've got swingle-trees," he added apologetically.

"I wisht' people'd fetch home what they borry," said the girl, with a sort of snap. "Maw wanted ter stew some dried peaches, and here our brass kittle's been over at the Thorntons' fer two weeks."

He felt that her apology for being on the road was better than his, and this threw him on the defensive.

"Our double-trees broke," he said.

Then, after a moment: "I'll take these back ter-morrer."

But really he had never thought of such promptness till then, and had never practised it in a region where the custom of the Thorntons was the rule.

"Air you-all's folk through sown' oats?" said the boy.

"Don't know. How many hens has your maw got settin'?" she replied.

"Don't know, but we've six little lambs," said Shan, indicating the progress of spring over his way.

"Maw took off forty chickens Monday," was her rejoinder.

Then there was a long conversational hiatus, as if interest held its breath. The horses jogged with a sort of dog-trot, the newly come meadowlarks sang on the utmost tree tops, "I see you sillies there!" the prairie horned lark, as Langille has it, giggled from a fence stake as they passed, "Quit! quit, you silly rigs, and get away!" and down on the branch in a near-by tangle of willows the blackbirds were wheezing out a lazy asthmatic serenade.

Now and then the horses bumped against each other, and Dolly, feeling that she was riding too near, perhaps, drew Bill off a little out of the path. Here he stepped in an old horse-track filled with water, and his piston-like foot sent a stream of slush up so suddenly and with such force that the boy could not close his eye quickly enough to dodge it. Shan dropped his reins,—and nearly dropped his burden,—and

with mouth wide open and face distorted he rubbed his lids and suffered. The girl drew up her horse, apologized extravagantly, and touched his cheek with her soft finger tips as she wiped the liquid slime away; and in all she showed such sweet sorrow to the muddy blinks which Shan got between his tears that he thought he had never known such sweet suffering.

He had barely got his vision cleared when they arrived where their ways parted.

"Good-by; I'm sorry that I hooked yer kittle," and

"Good-by; I'm sorry I filled yer eye," had been said.

Then an embarrassing pause ensued, as if more than this were obligated, when, with an impatient snatch at the snaffles, each horse turned away and relieved an embarrassing situation; for these young people still felt that long lingerings at farewells showed respect, and they had not yet learned the art of going.

Shan had not gone far when, in some indefinable way, he felt that he had left something yet behind. But his outfit was complete. Not one of the clips was off the single-trees; the clevis was in the midst, and its pin was there,

of course — even with the bit of leather in the slot to keep it in its place. Perhaps if he shifted the whole to the other shoulder it would be better. No, he still felt as if one suspender button were gone. Just then the old mare lifted her head and voice in one long shuddering, maternal wail, and he knew.

Dolly had realized an acquisition, just a few moments before; so that when Shan returning reached the forks of the road again, he saw her, some distance down the "Brushy Fork" lane, wildly waving her bonnet at the old mare's little black mule. At sight of her offspring Sal neighed again, and the colt brayed a reply but kept on following Bill, in spite of maternal calls and feminine remonstrance.

As Dolly "shooed" and flaunted, the colt ran into the briery rail-fence corner on the one side, or bounded over the brush heaps of trimmed-off hedge upon the other, and seemed to think that Bill was a good enough mother, and the Brushy Fork lane a good enough road for any plebeian mule at present.

Finally, with fine maternal prance, and with clips and hooks a-clatter, the old mare and Shan bore down upon the fray. Round and round,

between the two horses, beyond them both, the mule went in a sort of lost maze — the old mare shivering with her tremulous calling. Shan whistled “Whee-ooh! Whee-ooh! Whew!” in varying pitch, as if a ten-day-old colt knew the whole gamut; and Dolly whirled and “headed” and shied and “she-e-ed” and rattled the handle of her kettle. The braids of her brown hair had fallen down her back, her eyes were flashing with the excitement, and her face was bright with exertion and the humor of the occasion.

Finally the mule appeared to smell out, rather than see, its mother — seeming much surprised at her presence; and as it laid its head along her side, Shan knew that the fray was over.

He looked up into the pretty, blushing face, and said upon the impulse of its inspiration: —

“Say, tell your brother Henry I'll be over at you-all's house Saturday night to stay all night with him.”

And as he turned away the girl nodded and laughed out what he thought was such a sweet willingness to carry the message that he felt, as he rode on, that, besides the horse and his rider, he had left something behind him yet.

CHAPTER II

. . . “and in my breast
Spring wakens, too ; and my regret
Becomes an April violet
And buds and blossoms like the rest.”

— WORDSWORTH.

“Thoughts must come naturally, like wild flowers ; they cannot be forced in a hot-bed — even although aided by the leaf mould of your past.” — ALEX. SMITH.

ALL that afternoon and the next morning Shan rode the crab-tree drag, as he brushed in the oats and watched the “bull-heads,” or golden plovers, as they flew past him in great, mazy, migrating clouds, or swept, like wisps of fog, over the burnt fallow of the further field reserved for corn. Often the lazy haze of the heated air would quiver in the sunlight in a sort of vibratory unison with the shimmer upon the birds’ wings, as they stretched their feet in alighting. They seemed to make the earth alive before the rousing of root and leaf, as they ran — now one ahead, now another — over the blackened mould.

There was to him a peculiar appropriateness in their coming, not simply because they always had come, but because they came and went with the season which seemed to be a transient one, hinting of the summer's permanence that was not yet here. He was a boy who wondered; and he asked himself if this too were the reason why so many strange sensations came to him at this time of year only, and was the spring of his own longings and high, passing hopes to be followed by a greening and persisting summer?

After dinner he took the double-trees home; but he took the precaution to wear a coat and a better hat, and to put a saddle and a stiff-bit riding bridle upon another horse. It was not because he felt that a similar set of happenings would again befall him, but when his imagination put him amid the scenes of the day before, he felt better in being a little better prepared for them.

While returning toward home, he lived over the scenes of yesterday—even turning out to note where Dolly's horse had stepped into the mud-puddle; and though he could not feel the burden upon the shoulder or the keen

pain of the grating sand under his lids, he closed his eyes, and there was again, as in a dream, the soft brush of a finger upon his cheek.

Suddenly from the dead weed stalks in the draw where the blackbirds had sung yesterday, there broke forth the most rollicking, tinkling, broken-up, crushed-glass kind of bird melody that he had ever heard—something in perfect accord with his mood again; and looking up he saw a flock of black-and-white birds all mingled in with some plain, streaked, sparrow-like kinds—the former given to the utmost abandon of music. He had seen these birds before occasionally, but he never knew their names, and now he found there was more that he had not known, for he had heard the bobolink sing for the first time.

Maybe they have been singing before, he thought, and he had not noticed it. He was over to see Sister Mary and her new little babe, Sunday. Mary said it was just beginning “to notice”; and when she bowed and smiled and laughed and shouted at it in a very demonstrative way—why, it *had* “noticed” and smiled in return. Wonder if he wasn’t just beginning to

"notice"—a sort of second "noticin'," like his second teeth? Why was it that he hadn't noticed before yesterday what a pretty sister Henry Simpson had?

He reached up and pulled some buds from an overhanging elm branch.

"Why, these look like blossoms," he muttered to himself. "This tree's like er peach—blooms before it leaves." And he glanced across into the woods to see if the redbud and the serviceberry were in similar leafless glory yet.

He had known this girl from her babyhood. He had gone to school with her at the same house before the district was divided. When he was in Fractions—"complex fractions," she was saying that if she had one apple and the teacher gave her another, she would "eat 'em bofe," and was reading "May I go up" and swinging her little crossed feet under the hard benches.

While visiting at her home he had sneered down at her ignorance, or smiled patronizingly at her innocence, as the mood moved him, when she tried to talk "taws" and "knucks" with him and Henry; or he had openly rebuked her when she had slipped up and squeezed out,

between her little weak thumb and finger, a marble into the ring — as one shoots a slippery cherry seed.

She was about three years his junior, he reckoned: and while as a boy of about twelve he had had his passions, they were always for girls that were much his senior, rather than the reverse. He recalled gathering blue violets and other flowers for one of these; and because her name was Lizzie Williams, he remembered nothing in his past life that stood out then as such a fitting success, as when, one day, he presented her, slyly, on the way home, with a bunch of "Sweet Williams." Next to this bliss, perhaps, was the recollection of hoarding for her, in the bare pocket of his pants, choice bits of the savory tips of the roots of seedling hickory trees, which were known to him and his fellows as "sweet roots."

Why, that was long, long ago now — seven or eight years. He doubted if he would now know a "hickory with" that would pull well, or taste right when he got it. Yes, you loop the top into a ring and run a long pole through it, and let one end rest upon the ground — and — and then you strain the life out of you at the other

end, with the other fellows, till you feel the long, smooth, yielding slip of the tap-root away down below the "hardpan." And he smiled as he recalled how they used to brag upon poor, semi-idiotic Billy Benton, till in his big strength he did most of the work, and in his ignorance took for his portion the largest part of the root which was the toughest and most tasteless. By George! he would go out and pull a sweet root all by himself some day soon, just to remind himself of his youth. He believed he could pull one now with his hands only—especially if the ground were wet.

And Dolly Simpson again! Why, he used to "fight roosters" with her occasionally, as she called hooking together the heads of the blue violets, to see whose was the stronger; and once, he recalled, she had come to him with some fresh, crimson, black-jack buds, that he might, with his strong grip, squeeze out their juice to stain her cheeks—her little fingers not being strong enough. And as she turned her little cheek sideways up to him, he thought with a thrill now of how, just to tease her merely, he had kissed the fair face and got a ringing slap upon his own for his pains.

My! what a "plague" she was! She knew his weakness for the bigger girl, and with a coterie of other little ones which she led, sang teasing songs about "One kiss from Lizzie to keep him sweet," and some other stuff now forgotten. She bore to him, with great enjoyment, teasing messages from the other large girls, who were jealous of his attentions to Lizzie — a now somewhat washed-out beauty, long since married.

It came to him what a keen eye Dolly always had for the effects of water upon a boy's hair, and how she delighted in shouting out, "You boys have been to the creek!" — a forbidden luxury, because they often lingered too long beyond the call of "Books! books!" and the clatter of the ruler against the door jamb.

Once while the boys were in bathing, a neighboring youth, not in school, had mixed their shirts and declared that he had surely heard the master calling. A general scramble and fight had occurred, as charges and countercharges of theft had passed, and Shan had darkened Henry's cheek with a blow, in return for something equally as good. By next day it was all right again between him and Henry, yet as they sat and learned their lessons from the

same book, Dolly had not failed, every time he looked up at her, to stick her tongue out at him from behind her "McGuffey's First"; and when, at noon, he found her and her little "half-handed" mob drinking at the well, she threw some water over him, and he had to grit his teeth to keep from slapping her. "By George! think of that, *now!*"

When was it before that he had gone over to see Henry Simpson? Come to think of it, he had ceased going there long ago as a boy because that "towsled-headed" little sister of his, having no one else to play with, had always insisted on being in all the games—rejoicing ever at his loss or discomfiture.

So he had chummed since with Jim Williams — whose big sister was his early love.

And now here he was acting the hypocrite, with himself even, in saying that he wanted to go over and renew his friendship with Henry Simpson, and counting—here some *days* away — the *hours* till Saturday night should come.

CHAPTER III

"Chance sends the breeze, but if the pilot slumber at the helm—" — SCOTT.

"They who are ready to go are already invited." — THOREAU.

"PURTY wet, breaking corn ground to-day," said Henry, as the boys went out to put up Shan's filly Saturday night.

"Yes, purty tough pullin' for two with a sixteen-inch plough, now I tell yer," replied Shan.

"Specially if a feller covers more'n he cuts, as he nearly allers does"—socially chimed in Henry again.

"That's what I always do," said Shan. And he reflected that "maybe he did when he wasn't ploughin'—visitin', fer instunce."

The boys readily renewed their old comradeship, and, after going up to bed, they talked far into the night, till a series of raps on the headboard of the paternal bed below telegraphed to them that patience had its limits, and they went to sleep.

At supper and breakfast Dolly, in neat trim

bib-apron and with her hair in two long, heart-ravishing braids, red-ribboned at the tips, waited upon the table, acting as though Shan were only her brother's guest and she her mother's helper. She had scarcely begun to receive company yet—not at least in a direct "set-to," but occasionally boys rode to and from church with her, and met her out at neighboring places. Except at these table duties Shan saw very little of her now, and he imagined that he noted a sort of studied effort to avoid him. Perhaps, after all, he thought, he had *cut* a little more than he could *cover*, instead of the reverse.

Next morning, the boys went out to feed. To sit around the house while Henry worked would have been too pointed an intimation of the visitor's intentions of directly " settin' to" the girl, and too great a breach of the visiting etiquette of the region — a breach which only an open engagement to the daughter of the household would justify. After feeding at the barn they took a long walk over "the ridge" to feed some hogs on the other slope where the "bottom field" fringed out, this way, into the forest, and where its last year's crop lay moulding in a rail pen with a sodden roof of corn-fodder.

"Poo-ee-e! Poo-ee-e! Poo-ee-e! Pig! Pig! Pig! Poo-ee-e Poor-r-r Pig!" shouted Henry with a deep resonance throughout the woods; and the porkers came running in for their portion of "snapped" corn.

Some of the snow-birds that flitted in the borders of the thickets as they passed — not having gone north yet — seemed much more blackened about the head and breast than they were last fall, or when they appeared about the door-yard in the winter.

"I wonder what those fellers are so dressed up and gay about," said Shan.

"Just goin' somewhere and glad about it," said Henry. "You don't seem to be in your workin' duds this morning," and he glanced Shan over from head to heel.

There is founded deep in human nature — inherited from the very birds and beasts — especially when we are plainly clad ourselves, the tendency to be provoked to some emulous feeling, to phrase it mildly, when we stand in the presence of extravagant dress or ornaments acknowledgedly superior to our own; and the plume and crest and pretty furs, flaunted once in the forest to rouse a rival's ire, find yet

in aisle and pew a similar mission, so strongly still is the whole world kin. Then again, what more provoking thing than that sweeping vertical glance which we feel is "sizing us up!"

As the boys went back in that glad, joyous April air, they felt the muscular jubilance that it inspired, and they grew reminiscent of their younger days, how in their athletic struggles one or the other had prevailed. Shortly one slapped the other on the back and dodged and ran, and then they chased and foiled, until near the ridge top, in full sight of the house, they clinched, in boyish emulation. It was "catch as catch can," the mere impulse of the moment, no time for rules or special agreements—now "breeches holt," now back—now "grapevine," now side by side with thigh to thigh, with twist, and lift, and trip, and strain, with explosive bursts of breath and laughter shouts, till Henry had Shan fairly on his hip, and was about to hurl him forward to a fall. Just then the visitor saw Dolly at the back door shake out the crumbs from the tablecloth.

"Stop, Henry! I'll give up. You'll spoil my Sunday suit."

"And your reputation as a rastler," said the host as he loosed his guest.

"I can throw you any day with my old clothes on," said Shan.

Perhaps he could, for nothing is so hampering to a country boy as being dressed up, especially in a long-tailed coat.

As he straightened up he was astonished to note a certain horse hitched comfortably at the Simpson stiles, and a very sudden suspicion arose as to the purpose of this steed. Henry seemed to know it at a glance, and it must have been there before, for his eye at this distance easily recognized even the saddle as "Sol Jenkins, sure."

As they passed the horse-lot again, the geese were chattering, screaming, and hissing, and Shan wondered why some dames had two or three husbands and some gallants two or more wives, while some bachelors waited lonely on the borders of the flock, and some forlorn goose never had a sinuous neck straightened near her own or a single bill-snap or wing-stroke made to gain her favor.

As they were all mounting to start for church, Shan brought up the horse that had Dolly's

sidesaddle upon it,—his old friend Bill,—and she mounted and adjusted herself with many a bounce and tuck and shaking of her skirts, and thanked him kindly for his attention. But when he had mounted his little filly, after the many whirls she gave him as he leaped, and had really gotten his “bearings” well again, Dolly and Sol Jenkins were a dozen rods up the road, and Henry, reining in his impatient horse, was waiting for him.

So chagrined was Shan at his defeat that he did not go in when he got to church, but hung around with the loungers that regard “meetin’” as a place to meet congenial friends. He felt, in some way, that if he had gone in, all the gossipy world would have known that he had been “cut out”; and he was very careful not to say that he had stayed all night with Henry Simpson.

Not to go in was something of a privation to him, since the singing-master had been abroad in the land and had developed the boy into one of the neighborhood vocalists. Like all singers, he delighted in hearing himself and being heard—enjoying nothing else so much, except an error in some other singer’s effort. He was in no way superhuman.

At last, after the long service, when he had mounted his whirligig of horseflesh and was quiet, he saw Sol bringing up Dolly's horse. No sooner had she ridden away from the platform than Shan cut in beside her and asked if she were ready to go home. It was a daring thing for him to do and very embarrassing moment to Dolly. But Sol relieved the situation by coming politely up, yet unmounted, and asking Shan if he would not kindly see Miss Simpson home, since he had to go another way, and must deny himself that pleasure. Sol took a weekly story-paper and knew the proper thing to do to blunt defeat and yet retain his rights.

But now the burden of the conversation was upon him, for the girl was rather glum, and he had serious doubts about the etiquette of his position. If Dolly was at all pleased with the exchange, she was not advertising it.

"Thinking about the sermon?" said Shan, after a long time, in unfortunate desperation.

"No. But how'd ju like it?"

"Well — er — splendid. Brother Waterman is always good," he replied.

"Brother Thumper, I reckon you mean.

Brother Waterman wasn't there. You must ov set far back."

"Well — er — yes — ruther!" he stammered.

"I thought I heard your voice behind me. You sing tenor, I think. You ought ter set fur-ther up. Your music's needed."

Shan set his teeth against further lying if possible.

"No, you didn't hear me sing. I didn't have no book," he added. Surely that was the truth.

"There was plenty around me," and she glanced shyly at him. "You should set further up next time," she repeated.

There was a bit of mischief in her tones.

"Or mount just a little sooner?" he said, in the same spirit, bending forward to see her averted face.

They were passing now over the bit of road on which they had ridden together last week, and the remembrance of those events had silenced them. Neither spoke during its entire length. When they passed the point where she had splashed his eye, the girl turned to him and smiled a contrition that she felt; and at the other place, — after turning off toward her house, —

where the mother had found her mule, they looked into each other's faces and laughed aloud. They were nearing her stiles when Shan, feeling that the good-humored occasion would justify it, blurted out:—

“Why didn't you wait for me this morning, Dolly?”

“Oh, you came over to our house, you know, to see my brother Henry,” she said in the dignity of good grammar; “he waited for you, didn't he? Won't you come in?” as she slid upon the stiles. “Henry'll be at home shortly,” still with a rising inflection.

But he hitched her horse for her, said “good-by” as she gathered her riding-skirt about her, and without dismounting he rode home.

CHAPTER IV

"And grasp the skirts of happy chance
And breast the blows of circumstance."

—TENNYSON.

"Before man made us citizens great Nature made us man."

—LOWELL.

THERE were at least two things that bore heavily down upon Shan next day as he fixed the old worm fence that lay between the middle prairie field and the "back forty" of virgin sod. The one was that having directed his visit at Henry solely, he could not again, with rustic propriety, go over to the Simpson's till Henry had come to see him once. He felt, too, that this visiting from Henry would not be so responsive now as in their younger school-days, when "you go home with me to-night and I'll go home with you ter-morrer night" was the rule.

The other was the consciousness that he was not up to the undertaking of a regular courting campaign; he doubted the policy of it, even if he were. Yet he must look out for being too much given to subterfuges. Twice yesterday

she had caught him fibbing certainly. She had always known his weak points and tendencies, and he had had a broad hint that she mistrusted his sudden interest in her brother.

But while he knew that she would never respond to his attentions till he came out manfully and aimed them directly at her, he could not help feeling that his modesty and greenness made all that impractical now. He was too blunt, he felt. He knew himself too ardent. The girl was too shy. He would spoil the thing with the boldness of it, as he feared he might have done already. He must have some sort of lubrication, the foil of an excuse for getting near her and some machinery for working out his plans.

He did not like the idea, either, of depending upon mere accidents. They were *too* purposeless. He would just set his will or willingness rather in the way of opportunity — and wait.

“Boo-hoo-hoo! Boo-woo-woo!”

“Where was that now? Birds is kinder ventriloquists often. Why, it’s over in the prairie paster there. George! it’s been er long time since I heard that ser close. Never could see ‘em at it. What does it mean, anyway? Won-

der just where it is. There! Look at that un flyin' to that spot—and another'n. It's close by the deep draw there."

With back bent he crept down the deep "wash-out" that ran out of the field into "the forty," and when he looked up at the assembly of the prairie grouses—not twenty yards away—he began to mutter:—

"Whatter they doin', anyway? Is it er meetin' er a dance? Looks like both! That old feller bowin' low and throwin' his coat-tails high looks like he's preachin'. That other's shoutin', I reckon—and some's sayin' 'amen,' I guess, like ther Methodis'. Then there's ther air and alto of the sisters in that cacklin' and ther deep bass of the—No! that's not religious, surely! Fightin', as I'm a sinner, and showin' off and fightin' ag'in. See them women—hens, I mean—just cacklin' a little on the outer edge and scarcely lookin' at ther ring. And look at that now! that slick young rooster just a-walkin' off with the prettiest pullets while the struttin' and scratchin' is goin' on in camp."

He rose up—coughed, and the assembly was dispersed.

"Queer things is prairie chickens," said the

boy, as he crawled back under the water-gap to his work. "Some other folks is queer, too."

It was a peculiarity of this boy that though he knew the rules of grammar and could put on "good speech" when the occasion demanded, as he put on his good manners or his good clothes, yet he always thought in his vernacular of "countryfied" talk, and usually conversed with his fellows in the same way.

Yet it was not so strange after all, for his mother had rocked him to sleep with lullabies sung in it, and soothed his hurts with the crooning baby words of it; and all that the school-teacher had been able to do yet was to make the "I have saws" and "I sees" a little scarcer in the younger generation than in the older.

There were times when under the special strain of care, politeness, dignity, or irony this boy, Dolly, and others could sustain a conversation in proper tense, mood, and case, with some hints of orthoepy in the clear ring of the "ings"; but when alone or with each other only, or when strong feelings came suddenly, the grammar rules were merely fragments. Their educations were far beyond their practice.

"I guess old Sal won't lift that rider off," as he thought of the roguish mare and glanced at the top of the tall stake that he had just set. The old mare had a habit of lifting up the riders with her neck, backing off, and laying them down till the fence was low enough to leap.

"I reckon girls is er little like prairie hens," he ruminated, as he parted a thin place in the hedge on the way home and crawled through. "Likes ter be fought and rastled fer a little, and showed off to er blamed sight and boo-hooed erbout some. Met out with, too, er grain er so, and stolen off with now and then. Fer what else did them hens come ter that circus?

"Hen- and human-nature ain't far apart, I guess.

"'Spect I'd blow my neck up into bladder balloons, too, if I thought it ud make me look handsomer. See what er fool I am erbout my necktie. Can't ever git one red enough."

That afternoon he drove the wagon down to the "timber fawty" upon the creek to split out a few more rails to finish his fence — something his father said he should have done during the winter "before the sap riz."

He was walking round and round a small

white oak, looking at its knots to determine its splitting qualities, when he heard a bird song entirely new to him. This, of course, was not remarkable, but when he threw his head back and looked, there sat over him two bluejays, and from one came a beautiful subdued warble —not much unlike a young mocker's first effort.

"I reckon that's ther male, but dogged if I knew a jay had any such song as that. Thought all he knew was, 'jay, jay,' 'chee-dick, chee-dick,' and his old 'pot-licker' cry and his hawk-mawks and a few other squawks," muttered the boy to himself.

Just then the "other one" flew down into the spreading limbs of a black-haw bush, and the singer flew near and began hopping round and round in a circle not a foot away, and grew almost frantic with his song. The lady moved up again into the lower limbs of a trim oak sapling. The male alighted on a bough just in front of her and, ceasing his song, turned his back to her and began to waltz right and left, showing the beautiful blue-and-white markings of his coat. Anon he turned around and, with elevated crest and expectant glance, bowed to her. But she sat upright only, and kept an eye upon the boy.

Again and again the lover waltzed and pranced, and turned and bowed, till at last when he came down in a most profound salaam, the lady bowed in return and lifted her wings in the merest quiver, like a young bird begging to be fed.

"I'll be dinged if she didn't say 'yes,'" said Shan, disgusted that courtship should be so easy; and he stepped on a stick that snapped.

Around the trunk of the tree the birds hopped upon the limbs, with scared looks, ascending in spirals till they reached the top, when, with their screams of "jay! jay!" they flew off.

"Well, the birds puzzle me," said the boy. "He never said a word! Just sung and danced — and bowed er little and made er fool of his-self."

And he sank his axe with a sort of desperation deep into the oak's heart.

CHAPTER V

"Gossip . . . taken in homeopathic doses was as refreshing in its way as the rustle of leaves and the peeping of frogs."

—THOREAU.

"That dreary time that comes between
The last snow and the earliest green,
One barren clod the wild fields lie,
And all our comfort is the sky."

—LUCY LARCOM.

"To love her was a liberal education." — STEELE.

TUESDAYS and Fridays were the "grinding days" at Durkee's mill, which, located on Brushy Fork, at first did only sawing, but had put in burrs to accommodate the neighbors.

"It was no use," Durkee had said, "to think of Mondays and Saturdays. The corn couldn't be shelled a Sunday night, and Saturday everybody in creation and his wife must go ter town, and either trade or stand around with their hands in their pockets. Never see such a people."

Durkee was from further east, and used "see" where his neighbors used "seen."

But his indictment was a true bill. He could

safely put his people's record against the world for watching the sale of stock in which they had no interest and discussing politics of which they had no knowledge. Some went to town to see a man, of course; for neighbors living within two miles of each other said, as they parted with unfinished business, "Well, I'll see you in town Saturday," when town was ten miles away. Others felt better when they had the excuse of hauling two bushels of corn to town in a farm wagon to have it ground at the "flourin' mill," or more likely to swap it for meal already ground.

In fact, the prospect of this exchange was usually their excuse for going to town instead of to Durkee's—they "didn't have ter wait ser long"; but often, with politics and gossip, the day was wholly spent anyway. On these other days the mill was a good rival of the village, and the very thing that Durkee had growled about became the source of his bread and meat. The improvident are always with us, and the gossip is a little nearer the bone and sweeter, as Thoreau has it, at the neighboring gathering.

If you went early in order to get your "turn" in soon, there was the long wait for steam to

get up — for this giantess was not an early riser in the old double-tubed boiler of the rural mill. Then it was quite likely that the belt must be laced, or even the piston packed, before a start.

When once going, gossip of the most savory sort seemed to start afresh along with the redolent meal, as it ran hot from the spout under the whirring burrs ; and the frequent dog-fight and occasional man- or boy-fight were always possibilities at least worth staying for. Once when a growing feud between two families had culminated, late one Friday afternoon, in a settlement with fists, half of the Brushy Fork region had almost rent its raiment because it had allowed itself to get its grinding in the morning.

“Oh, let the squire’s turn come before mine, I ain’t in no hurry,” was the favorite formula of altruism in those days at Durkee’s mill. And these great, grown-up, rough men bowed to each other in the same crude courtesy with which the giggling girls of the rural picnic stand over the ice-water barrel and say : “You drink,” “No, you drink,” “No, you drink,” “No, you drink,” while the thirsty bystander nearly dies to get hold of the dipper. Nothing else but consulting doctors, attitudinizing with all the etiquette of the profes-

sion, while the patient suffers, could exceed the courtesy of a gossipy grinding day at a rural mill.

Of course, too, the sawing days were somewhat social, but a man with energy enough to haul saw-logs usually went directly back after another. Besides, the everlasting buzz of the old circular disk as it ran in, choked up, gagged, backed, heated, and spluttered under the water's dash, was not conducive to that perfect flow of soul which the even hum of the burrs inspired.

You could not go off out of the sound of that old saw and sit down with any peace of mind. Its probabilities were too enticing. It "chawed and spit" wood with such vengeance, as some one said, that you could not stay away if you were near it. At any moment its belt might break and slap the sawyer into eternity, or a slab might be jabbed into its teeth by an awkward workman and two or three men hurled among the cogs or, possibly, upon the saw itself, and be torn asunder. The danger was always imminent, but the strain alone, without converse, was too tense for comfort. So the great log was usually rolled off by turning the wagon over, and the customer had the chances of another day when he came for his lumber—

two or three of them perhaps before he got it; and he went away cheered by the hope that, upon these, some monotony-breaking thing might happen.

All over that country, that heating, warping old disk had left its marks — the hieroglyphs of disappointed hopes; for wherever a fence was stretched or a frame arose, there were double kerfs or circular notches and feather-edged planks in sight.

Shan had shelled his corn the night before, assisted by his father, hurling the red cobs into the open fire which the cool nights yet demanded. Previous to this it had usually been his plan to put the tight well-filled sack upon the bare back of old Sal and, mounting it with care, ride it to mill. Many an hour, when too small to lift the sack into its place again, should it have fallen, he had ridden thus, while the anxious strain lest he should lose his balance had been some of the acutest suffering that he had ever known. How he had longed to be a man, that he might acquire the skill to balance right, or, better, the strength to place the sack back if it fell!

But now he was not going to mill that way,

first because it was too wet to plough this cold drizzly time, and horses were therefore plenty; and, second, now that he had acquired it, he cared no longer for the accomplishment of balancing a bag.

Then there was a third reason: He might meet *somebody* upon the road, and a meal sack was a poor place to exhibit a graceful carriage. Somehow he had become much concerned about graceful carriages of late. So behind the pair of roan mules he would go, standing in the jolting wagon-box; for he was to pass the school-house where a certain dark-haired girl was yet taking lessons in the "higher branches."

So past it he went, with the spring-seat taken down and lying upon the bottom — his stiff self standing well balanced, with whip cracking and the mules trotting in the crisp April air. He felt that surely this balancing of himself was something to be admired.

Shan had not stayed all day at the mill solely because he loved the gossip, but with the intention of being, very accidentally, of course, upon the road about the time a certain girl with braided hair ought to be going home. Hence

the mission of the spring-seat, which was in its proper place upon the return trip, in the hope that *some one* upon invitation might ride with him.

But his heart fell as he *met* Dolly a little way this side of the school-house (instead of *overtaking* her on the other) going home with Sissy Jenkins to stay all night. He wondered if she had such a scheme toward Sol as he had toward her, when he used Henry as a foil. No, he would not think that. She and Sissy were good friends, and Henry and Sissy were good friends also—if not something more.

Why didn't he have a sister of his size whom the girls could visit?

Glancing up, he found the teacher, whom he had not thought of, turning out of the road to let him pass, and, at her bow, he stopped, and, in pure kindness, asked her if she would not ride. She climbed into the spring-seat beside him. She boarded with some old friends of hers, the Brights, who lived just beyond Shan's father's farm.

Miss Winnie Hudson was one of those teachers whose ways were not confined to the stilted methods of the institutes. She was an indi-

vidual herself, and recognized each pupil before her as an entity apart from another. She *felt with each learner*, and threw into all her teaching the influence of a strong and very striking personality. Besides acquiring her teaching, her pupils acquired *her*. She wore constantly the unconscious habit of instructing, as much out of school as in it, and was a slave to pedantry for her pupils' sake.

Her knowledge and her education were far beyond books. She had been the *little* daughter of an eastern professor of natural history, who came west to Minnesota in the days when it had the reputation of curing consumption with its climate; and in her youth and young womanhood she had been more than the *larger* daughter to him as he roamed the fens and forests in his nature-studies. She was his eager pupil and fellow-student till she went east again to finish her education.

Then, after her graduation, when her father's death had left them straitened, she had supported herself and mother by taking schools, and, as a motherly-hearted woman will, she had always felt an interest in the large, overgrown, awkward, country striplings who came to her. She

was a born lover of boys and birds. She was not so profoundly informed; but she held everything she knew by the hilt.

In some way Mr. Bright had secured the neighboring school for her here, and she had left her mother in her northern home and had come to teach it.

"Mighty poor showing for grass yet," said Shan, spurring his enunciation a little.

"Yes," she replied, as she drew her wrap up, "it is positively cold yet; but in spite of the lack of sunshine, things begin to grow slightly in response to the alchemy of shower and cloud-subdued light. Spring, Mr. McBride" (no one had ever called him that before, and he took a few kinks out of the hump of his back), "is not all a matter of temperature, of flowers, and grass and leaves, or of melody from the throats of birds that come to us. There are other subtler evidences of its coming. Like early vegetables, there's a keen relish of them, because the heart is so hungry for them after its long winter fast."

Shan lifted his foot and put it out upon the brake lever, not because there was any need of it, but because he knew not what else to do.

Perhaps he felt things were getting a little too fast for him.

"The mole, I notice, in the yard has begun his ploughing and ditching; the cow licks her flanks into pasty curls, much as you boys brush your hair; the white hen-eggs flock the smooth depression in the hayloft a little more frequently now, and the horse, casting it shred at a time, is losing his winter coat."

There was quite a period of silence.

"I declare, this ride is simply entralling to me. Look at those catkins on the hazels—those long, grayish, wormy things," she hastened to add as she saw him staring blankly. "They shine now with a new gloss; and the bunches of the black haw buds there are breaking their autumn covering into which Mother Nature tucked them last fall for their winter nap. You recall how spread out the black haws are in fruit?"

He nodded an interested face at her, and reached out and took in the lash of his whip.

"As you say, Mr. McBride, there is no flush yet of the earth into vernal green." (Shan wondered when he had said just this.) "She is only yawning and stretching now in her great

strength as she begins to wake from her winter sleep."

Shan had never heard anything before like this. It was like reading a book—but better, for it had in it the teacher's inspiring face. She was not so pretty as Dolly, he thought, but how her countenance could beam and her eyes flash! His sentimental nature rejoiced at such conceptions. There were things here that had been dreamt of, just the merest bit, in his philosophy, but not formulated.

"Now this is one of the compensations of living in the frigid north," she continued; "I'm from much further north yet, you know."

Shan nodded as he thought of northern Minnesota as in almost hailing distance of the pole.

"Ever been south, Mr. McBride?"

"Nome."

"At the south something is always green, you know,—a great beauty and blessing, of course, but there is not the sudden contrast of the seasons there as here, to stimulate us into the best of observation and appreciation. In the south spring is simply an earnest—a sample—of a six months' summer."

— *or Tom-Ti-Some*

There was some pause.

"Did you ever think that few southern writers were written characteristic of the seasons?"

Sher said "No" of course with an inward urge that she would not expect him to keep up his side of the conversation.

"Well now they just wouldn't you know. They never saw the brutal summer of Irving, the winter of Whittier or the spring of Thoreau. Even John Burroughs came near getting into the south the winter he spent at Washington."

SAID SHER: This was a Dutch to him, he thought and he reached for the brake again with his free

"I say," she continued, "there is a great compensation for all our sufferings up north, where nearly everything browns at the winter's breath; and we have the privilege every spring of being present at the resurrection-morn of earth. I just rejoice every spring with the birds that stay with us, as I go out and stand sponsor with them at the new year's birth. Such a day as this just lets us into the very laboratory of nature, and if we will only look, we can almost see her drop the elements of growth into the soil. Some

one has said — Thoreau, I think — that it is a dangerous thing in our lives, if we ever reach a period when we have no response to this, and fail to ground our faith and hope upon the vernal prophecy."

CHAPTER VI

"All the reasonings of men are not worth one sentiment of women."—VOLTAIRE.

"Effort is itself the deed."—THOREAU.

WHEN the teacher looked up, the boy's face had caught her enthusiasm, with a soft, sad tenderness in it which she did not understand.

"I love the spring," he said, "the birds and flowers — and, and — things," by which last he meant all the pretty sentiments which he had just heard her express; "but I—I just love em," he almost broke down. "I think they make me love other people better;" he blushed; "my family, relations and such," he explained, almost with a gasp. "I'm always hopeful in the spring," he continued, "but summer don't always pan out.

"I don't see anything in nature, such a day as this, to hope about," he added, as the teacher remained attentively silent. "Although I know a sunny day is coming, I can't feel it, and this gives me ther blues."

"Well, we are all that way too much," she said, consolingly—"but Nature isn't. She just seems to hope and wait. Listen now to the songs of birds that stay with us in the winter. What do you call that little fellow there swinging under that limb tip?"

"Well, us boys call him 'See-Billy,' but I think some calls it a chickerdee."

"Well, now that's good. 'See-Billy' and 'see-chickadee-dee-dee-de-de-de' are just his small talk about the weather and the hard times, you know, but one of his true songs is 'fee-bee'—sometimes 'fee-be-be,' which, chimed with the 'Peter! Peter! Peter!' of the little crested titmouse, or sugar-bird, is one of the first spring sounds we hear. Of course you know that sap-raiser, the sugar-bird. Perhaps his call is first—"

"Yes'm. I know him, but I heard a red-bird sooner," said the boy.

"Good again, I reckoned without my host that time. I had forgotten the cardinal. He migrates from our region. Maybe you have some of ours down here. That is one advantage of living south, for the cardinal and some others sing at intervals during the winter there,

or here rather, I should say; and, at the first flash of spring, the male chickadee bursts into full song — ”

“ And the female too,” he broke in, “ sings in reply to her mate, but — ”

“ Why, that is interesting. I did not know it. You are an observer. You sing, I think, Mr. McBride. Did I not hear your voice last Sunday? No? Did you ever notice, I was going to say, that this ‘fee-bee’ of the chickadee is a perfect *sol mi* of the scale?”

“ I never did, but it is, by George!” he said, his face lighting. He whistled it — sang the *sol mi* to it. “ It’s so.”

“ Sometimes it is a little flat,” she said.

“ Oh, that’s ther female’s reply,” he laughed, whistling the song a half tone down. “ Girls is often er little off on pitch.” And a mischievous light that she had scarcely expected flitted across his face.

In fact, the boy was beginning to reveal himself to her, and her appeal to him for information was a new sensation to him. He stretched himself a little, took a few more humps out of his back, and reached out a foot and braced himself against the front end-gate.

"There!" she said, jerking his arm. "What do you call that little bird, head downward, upon the elm trunk. We call it a nuthatch, but —"

"Don't know as I ever heard any name for that," he fibbed, as he styled "white lying"; for all the boys in imitation of the birds' talk called them "yanks," but since he knew that the teacher had heard of herself as being called a "yank," his delicacy forbade him to speak it.

"It must be awfully hard on his hind toe to hang there so long," she said sympathetically; but the boy broke out into a laugh.

"Now what are you laughing at, Mr. McBride? I declare, you are the most provoking man!" (Man? Instantly he was taller by a foot!) "What *have* I done now?"

"Nothin', only he don't hang all the time by his hind toes, that's all."

"Oh, tell me how it is, then. Do not shut up like a sphinx when I am dying to learn, you know."

"Why, he just stretches one leg up behind him and hangs by the front toes of that — like er squirrel, runnin' down er tree, uses *his* hind legs," he said, with a bit of pride.

"Now that makes it all clear. In a recent

number of a well-known magazine, there was an article on the gray squirrel by a naturalist, as he would style himself, and it was illustrated by another who makes a specialty of nature-drawing. In it the squirrel was pictured as running down the tree with all his feet under him. I said 'Mamma, what *is* the matter with this squirrel?' but she could not tell me; and I went to Willie Duncan, who hunts, but he could not say; so I walked down to the professor of natural history in the high school, who cuts up a cricket, a crawfish, and a pigeon before his class and calls it biology, but he said the squirrel seemed all right to him. And now here you flash out a comparison merely that puts the matter all right. The squirrel should have had his hind legs stretched back up the tree, should he not?"

"Or been uh backin' down like er cat," said Shan.

The teacher went further in her commendation of his habits of observation, asking him for real information about the birds of the region. She had often noted him going about his work industriously yet lonesomely, and she had felt sorry for him, and had nodded to him as she

passed, with a great desire to meet and know him better.

She was many years his senior, and had passed through many moods like this which she had found him in to-day. She wished to rouse him out of it. As they neared his gate she insisted on getting out and walking home, but Shan drove her on to her own stiles or "hitchin' blocks," — which, however, he could not induce the mules to approach so closely as he wished. So Miss Hudson had to step upon the edge of the wagon-bed, then on the tire, thence to the hub and the ground, as he held her hand.

"I am so grateful to you for your information, and am sorry to have given you so much trouble," she said, and turned to bid him good-by. But she was almost frightened at the look in his face as he stood holding his lines.

"I don't know how I ought ter say it," he blurted out, "but I don't want you to feel that I don't appreciate all you've said to me. Nobody ever talked to me that way before. They jest asked about the crops and stock — and ther folks, sometimes. But you seem interested in a feller, and nobody ever found out that I

knew anything, either. I don't know much—not ser much as you try ter make me feel, but oh, Miss Winnie, I just want and want and want ter *know*.

"I wish't I could go ter school ter you, Miss Winnie. It does seem strange that because he's twenty the law should stop er feller from goin' ter school, jest when he's gittin' some sense, and start him in at six, when he's er little fool. I know readin', writin', spellin', and grammar,—yes, grammar, even if I don't talk it. My teachers didn't talk it, tho' they taught it. I know algebra, geometry, ernatermy and hist'ry some—but I don't know what ter do with 'em. All other teachers just talked books to me with the great world wide open only at A B C.

"I didn't know that there wuz books about nature—nature feelin's, you know. I thought all writin's was tex-books or hist'ries about things that couldn't happen here, and about stories that maybe didn't happen anywhere.

"I went to St. Louis last fall with er load of steers, and on er Sunday I went out to Forest Park, much of which is nuthin' but woods ter me; and I saw people goin' wild over their beauties. One woman was takin' on over the

beautiful shadin' of the 'likens,' as she called 'em, on ther rough bark of er tree — the little scaly white spots, you know. They had helped me at night to find the north in my coon-hunts, but I couldn't see anything pretty about 'em. But it must be there — but — but — you know I never believed it till to-day, Miss Winnie, when I heard you talk. I can't see it yet, but I *will see it.* Others were carryin' on about the bird music — which was so poor then, that it was only squeaking ter me, but, by George! — excuse me, Miss Winnie — don't you know I just jumped when you said the chickadee sung in the scale; not because it is so strange, I reckon, but because I had never noticed it. I used ter see them jumpin' in checkers, and it seemed so foolish, and yet it was so interestin' when I learned; and a day or so ago in town I saw a game of chess — two fellers sittin' humped up with their chins in their hands — and it seemed foolisher still. But I — it must be interestin' too.

"I shall jest tremble now to go out, for fear Nature is playin' some great game at my feet and I don't know ther moves.

"I read er poem once about birds settin' on the telegraph wires and not knowin' that great

messages were passin' through their grasp, and I remember that I pitied 'em—and now—since you talked to me, Miss Winnie—the great world seems throbbin' under my feet, and I—I—can only hear the hum. I know Nature when she's passin' by, but where's she goin' and what's she goin' fer?

"But I'm wakin' up. I find things pretty I never thought pretty before," and he blushed, "and I have feelin's at the sounds and sights of things that I never had before—and you can help me more, Miss Winnie, won't you?" And his lip quivered again as he looked wistfully into her face. "Won't you, Miss Winnie?"

Not only was Miss Hudson's heart touched, but her teaching instincts were roused, as no pupil had ever roused them. Oh, that she had a houseful of such pupils! The boy, in her estimation, came out at once from the realm of manhood, back into the scholar again; and she put her hand upon his shoulder, and called him "Shan," and with a full heart and voice, said that she should be glad to help him if she could.

"Perhaps," she added, "I cannot do so much for you as you think, but I may aid you in help-

ing yourself, for in your case a great cry for help *is* help."

He climbed up to his seat, and she walked over the blocks into the house.

At the door she glanced back at him, bumping down the road.

"The boy is in love," she mused, "and has been for a while. There is nothing so awaking as that. I wonder who it is."

And she recalled an early dream.

CHAPTER VII

"To be commonplace is to strike the balance of a great number of positive qualities." — ELLIOTT COUES.

"Our limbs indeed have room enough. It is our souls that rust in a corner." — THOREAU.

"I am the very slave of circumstance — and impulse."
— BYRON.

THE boy was right, in a certain sense, when he said that he knew Nature when she passed. He had no companions at home but dogs and stock, so that Nature, in a childish way, had been his playmate. His sister had married and gone from home when he was about twelve years old.

Alone, he had hunted much in the woods day and night. He knew the tall trees that were the coon's castles and the high hills of the 'possum's rambles. He had a quick eye for the smooth holes where the squirrels hid or the leafy hammocks where they dozed the heated hours away.

The tangles where the Bob-Whites would stand and sun themselves stood out to him at a

glance, and when the ruffed grouse drummed, he knew his perch and the screens to dodge behind as he crept up on him.

No bird could long hide her nest from him, if her shy ways piqued his search, and he knew by her scolding moods and very petulance the progress of her incubation, and whether her young were in or out of the nest yet.

In winter, he looked at the tracks in the snow and read the purposes of the runners, and in the spring he could tell you where the "Spring-beauties" and "Deer-tongues," as he called the "dog-tooth violets," would open first. He cared not for the beauty of the skyey-colored corolla of the latter, but remembered it because mother liked the lance-like leaves for greens sometimes, since they made milder the mustard or the turnip tops; and he liked the fang-shaped bulb himself for its faint sweetness.

Often he had watched the bee heap pollen upon its legs, and, with a hunter's intuitions, had divined, by its flight, whether it belonged to a neighbor's hive or "our'n."

At home, proud of the fact that he was one of those that bees did not sting, he had lain under the buzzing "stand" and watched the workers

as they dragged the drones out, stinging them to death as they came; and he had wondered why the latter did not go to work and save their lives—not knowing then that they could not, and that Nature cared for love as well as labor.

The cruelty of the order of things did not appeal to him, but in the crudity of his childish thought he assigned motives and mind to all things,—the hawk that stole the chickens and the crab grass that choked the crops, alike. He had a keen delight in feeling and wreaking a sort of vengeance against the things he did not like—cutting down a thorny honey-locust or spiny thistle with clinched teeth and with enmity in his heart, and hurling a stone, with a sort of savage thrill in his splendid aim, at the whining catbird in the bush.

To him nothing was useful but corn, wheat, oats, hay, grass, stock, and the like—possibly the fruits and vegetables, but these latter bordered closely upon the things he ought to hate because of a boy's antagonistic horror of piddling in a garden. That anything could exist for beauty had scarcely got farther into his life than his necktie or his saddle—until recently,

with the sprouting of the fuzzy streak upon his lip, it was beginning to dawn upon him that, beyond the horizon of the merely useful, there was a morning yet.

Next Sunday, at another church that was in another direction from his home, as he stood outside, he saw Miss Hudson going in just a little behind her folks. She was looking his crowd over with unapproving glance, he thought, and as he caught her eye he stepped quickly to her side and walked in with her. When he took his seat beside her he did what he had never done before—sat with a woman on the women's side. Doubtless when he was a babe his mother had bounced him upon her knee, till he cried in tremolo with the score of others shrieking around him, but his memory could go no further back than the picture of his little staring, wondering self, still covered with a black wool hat well set back, being dragged by his father's hand up the long aisle on the right, while his mother and Mary had gone up the left.

The old church still had the two doors in front, and only recently had any one—except young swells out from town with their girls—been

brave enough to violate their traditional suggestiveness.

Shan's clear tenor rang out loud with the teacher's alto; and people turned and stared, astounded that he should be over there, and proclaim it so. Back of him a little he heard Dolly's "air," rising up with such searching tones that he could not help thinking of the birds upon the tree tops shouting out their whereabouts; and the old, wild, gallant impulse came to him, which he could not have carried out for worlds, to get up and go back by her side.

As they walked to the long platform whence the horses were usually mounted or the wagons climbed into by the ladies, Miss Winnie said suddenly:—

"Shan, did that sermon help you much?"

"I don't know; I never thought much about it. Never took it to myself. Thought he wus after members of other churches or them that's not joined yet."

He did not tell her that he had not listened.

"Sometimes he gets after the rest of us," he added.

"Did it ever occur to you that you could

be helped without being ‘got after’?” she asked.

“Well, it never occurred to me that preachin’ helped me at all, after I joined,” he said, “lessen I should do somethin’ and be got after.”

“But when this man and the others speak week after week of baptism, communion, faith, and works—and all the mere dogmas, don’t you ever feel that you need something else after you get these?”

“I dunno. What else is there fer a preacher to say lessen you’ve stole somethin’ ur killed somebody?”

“Well, about keeping the commandments in a *positive* spirit, for instance. Say, instead of not taking things away from him, why not go on and add something actual to your neighbor’s comfort; instead of not bearing false witness, bear true praise?”

They stood a moment on the platform.

“Shan, there are refinements of religious life that are as much beyond that,” glancing back at the church, as the expression of the sermon, “as there are beauties of nature that you say you know not of.”

The wagon drew up.

"I have an old friend who preaches in town regularly. Now and then I just must hear him. Would you like to go in with me some Sunday morning and hear him, too?"

The boy's face shone as he said, "Yuh bet yuh," and he went off after his horse. But he was thinking more of the ride with the teacher than of the prospective sermon.

He saw Miss Winnie take the rear chair in the great wagon-box, and he felt that he would get his filly and ride along close behind her and continue the conversation. But he reckoned without his steed that time. He found the mare wild and impatient, because the horse hitched near her had gone. Knowing her ways, the boy, to save a scene, had tried to mount her in the woods, but a sudden start had scraped him off against a sapling. So he led her out into the open space, reined her tightly in, and, with a firm grip in her mane, sprang for the saddle. She made a series of whirls and started rapidly, in some direction, he knew not what, but he "stuck to her," and when he got his right foot in the stirrup and straightened up, the mare was going quietly beside another horse.

When Shan glanced around, Dolly Simpson

was looking him rather surprisedly in the face ; and her brother Henry, who had been wedged away from his sister's side, was spurring forward to overtake Sissy Jenkins, who was very considerately lagging behind her father a little further on. There was not any help for the situation. Shan did not dislike it, of course, but he was not prepared for it. He was not an emergency man, but the suddenness of this demanded an explanation.

"I couldn't hold this fool filly back," he blurted.

"Did you want to hold her back?" the girl asked, with a very cool, queer look in her face. "If you do, I'll help you;" and she began to rein in her horse.

"Oh, not at all," said Shan.

The conversation was not animated or interesting. Near Mr. Bright's gate they came up with the wagon, and, as it turned in, Miss Hudson glanced back and saw the couple. She bowed and smiled at both and seemed to be studying them, a little significantly, Shan thought, as they passed.

"Don't you think Miss Winnie's awful sweet?" said Dolly, with a school-girl's usual

gush over her teacher. Shan looked at her an instant to see if the old teasing twinkle were in her eyes, but her face was simply expectant.

"I think all ladies are nice," he replied, with a little policy evident.

"But some's nicer'n others, ain't they?" said the girl, still looking back at the departing wagon. "I just *love* her."

"Yes, I think some's nicer'n others," said Shan, his face blanching, his lips getting dry. This was another emergency.

There was silence—only the champ of the filly's bit and the leathery creaking of the saddles.

"Some that ain't teachers," he added.

The girl glanced at him with a scared look.

"Scholars, for instance," he continued. "Dolly, you know—"

"Oh, yes," she broke in. "I remember how you used to like Lizzie Williams."

"Used ters' ain't 'nows,'" he said, trying to regain his opportunity—his color and breath coming and going rapidly. "I was only a little boy then. A feller's taste changes, yer know."

"And a girl's too," she said.

His heart leaped.

"She's married now, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know," he said, "but I *ain't*, and—
and—"

What he would have said she never knew; for the filly had reached her own gate, and felt that it was her duty to go in, and go in at once. Shan set her head back toward the road, but she bent her neck to her shoulder, and went in sidewise, and when he spurred her she lunged along the fence.

The girl, at first, thought that Shan had intended to go in and leave her to go home alone, and she had ridden on—her spirit up a wee bit. Henry had turned off and gone home with Sissy Jenkins. But Dolly rode slowly, and glancing back, saw Shan still struggling with his mare; but to stop now and wait would not only break the intrenchments of her position, but might demand of him what he could not pay.

At last Shan dismounted, led the mare into the road and mounted her anew, but by the time he was fully on she was at the stile-blocks again. He rowelled her fearfully, but she only scraped along the fence toward the gate and thrust her head over it. As he looked up he

saw Dolly's hat sink lower and lower over the receding slope, till it alone seemed to rest and waver a moment upon the road at the crest of the slight swell, and then disappear. With teeth set he got down, led the mare into the lot, took the saddle off her with much difficulty, jerked the bit past her rattling teeth with cruel snatch, and stalked into the house.



CHAPTER VIII

"Nothing so unlike a woman as — another woman." — ANON.

"It is a maxim that those whom everybody allows second place are entitled to the first." — SWIFT.

"Nature cannot be surprised in undress." — EMERSON.

DOLLY's afternoon was spoiled — for other young men who might have called had said:—

"Oh, Shan McBride's there ter-day; seen him goin' home with her. Seems ter be er little struck that way er late." And they stayed away. Henry, of course, might not come home at all that afternoon, but go back to "night meetin'" with Sissy, as the frequent custom was.

She had rather expected Shan over to explain and apologize for deserting her, but when it grew late she gave it up, and doffing her company dress with her attitude of expectation, she put on a calico dress, a sunbonnet, some sheep-skin "half-handers," and said she would go over to Mildred "Watkins-es" a little while, and bring

some wild flowers to plant in the little dooryard bed.

Dolly was not afraid to dress plainly on this occasion—for Mildred was one of that class of girls whom everybody loves, except the young men in the right way. Appreciative persons often wondered why some fellow did not have sense enough to see her merit.

Many married men in the region assured their wives that when widowerhood was theirs, they would woo Mildred Watkins; and the matrons had declared that it would be some consolation if they knew that, after their deaths, their husbands *would* bring her into their homes, but instead of that “they’d just surely run off after some tittering young thing with no sense.” Somehow, a married woman expects her husband to show good taste only once in life.

One thing was certain, that Mildred was of that finest material the world knows—the stuff that good stepmothers and second wives are made of. Romantic to a turn, without the semblance of an actual romance in her life, affectionate to a fault without any special object, she was mother now to half the little children

of the region, and sister to half the boys and girls of her own age. More than this, she was the confidante of many; and endowed with a keen insight into the motives of those she met, it was hers to move in the romances of others and to live in sympathy, at second hand, a sort of sentiment that she could never realize for herself.

That she received no special attention from any one young man never seemed to worry her, since she enjoyed the respect so largely of them all. She viewed the gallants of her acquaintance as some other girl's lover, or, better still, as her own true friend. But she made no great demands of friendship. She took thankfully what the world gave, and overpaid largely for it in kind.

Between her and Shan there had always been the freest fellowship. They were much the same age—but her motherliness made her seem the older; and they had been playmates, not only at school, but at neighborly visits of their parents, and even alone romping together across the fields between their homes. Of her he never knew what it was to stand in awe, as he had of Dolly since she had moulted; and

with Mildred yet he was free and easy, so that she knew him at his best.

Dolly was sure that if any one knew Shan's feelings about herself—and she had begun, of course, to suspect that he had feelings—it was Mildred Watkins; so she had taken this walk, not for flowers, but for consolation and the hope of any crumb of comfort that Mildred might let fall.

As she turned aside to get a particularly fine bunch of prospective "bluebells"—just leaved out above the mould, she scared, from the root of a bush, somewhere, a peculiar brown-backed, long-billed, snipe-like bird, which seemed utterly unable to keep out of her way as she walked. Her heart went out in pity to the poor thing, and felt bitter toward the gunner who had shot it. Shan shot sometimes, and so did Henry. She wished they'd quit it—especially Shan. But, stooping for the plant, she saw almost at its root the merest apology for a nest and, in it, four pear-shaped eggs, thickly spotted with pale brown, almost like the dead leaves they lay upon.

"You hypocrite!" the girl cried. "I thought you were hurt."

The bird had now come nearer again and was in the second act of the old broken-wing drama — doing it wonderfully well. Dolly walked on, feeling better, since she was not alone, in the deep woods even, in using diplomacy and a sort of innocent hypocrisy for worthy ends. Were they not brooding here in the very brambles?

It was a warm welcome that Mildred gave her. The two girls were enough unlike to be great friends, and they were growing closer together now as Dolly began to develop into the womanhood which Mildred had reached some years before.

"Now, sumpthin' must have happened," Mildred said. "When did you ever come ter see me on Sunday afternoon before? You might just as well out with it. Oh, that flower story and that old chip-basket and case-knife won't do at all.

"You'd er dug your bluebell on the way back so 'twouldn't wilt if that was all you were after. Besides, ain't you ashamed to gather flowers to plant, on Sunday? Lonesome? Now if it wus me huntin' flowers and bein' lonesome, it might go. Where's Shan McBride? Didn't I see him runnin' his horse to death to catch up with you? 'Twas runnin' off

with him? Stuff, Dolly Simpson! Horses don't run off with Shan McBride very easy! Why, didn't he really go home with you? That's funny! What did you do to him? Huh! That's funny again. Maybe he's hurt. You don't know-o-o-o-o? You didn't stop ter see-e-e-e! Just rode on — didn't ask if he wus hurt, nor nuthin'! Wel-l, Dolly Simpson! Why, I've a great notion to go right over there myself and take you with me. I would if you were dressed up. Oh, you needn't get so humpy. But ain't it strange that he didn't get on another horse and foller you!"

"That's — that's what I wus thinking," said Dolly.

"I know," said lisping little Sam, Mildred's youngest brother, "coth paw and me comed by there to thee about bor'rin' their theed-thower, and The-an he hobbled out and thaid that the thorrel filly had dust tored the whole thide of his panth out nearly, ginth'd a bobbed wire."

The girls laughed; Dolly brightened, but in a moment was more serious.

"Did he limp much, Sam?" she said, in such a way that even the child caught her interest.

"Well, I should thay tho," said Sam, quick to

enlarge an interesting incident up to its fullest demands. "He thes thank away down on one thide—tho." He gave an imitation of Shan's walk with a terrible stiffness in one leg, and a dreadful shortness in the other.

"Did—did you see any blood, Sam?" Her lips were parted a little.

"He had on his ole panth, but there wath a hole in hith knee. Maybe 'twath hith med—medercated flanninth that I thaw what wath red," the boy replied, very sceptically, of course.

Red flannels, sold and reputed as medicated, were worn all over that region then as a cure and preventive of rheumatism. But Mildred gave Dolly a look that had blood and more in it, and sent that fluid back to the penitent girl's heart.

"Sam, did he look much hurt?"

"Well, thes thorter tho—looked mighty thad, you know. I thuppothe becauthe hith Thunday thuit wath thuppoiled" (Mildred gave Dolly an awful look). "A tored plath in your panth ith er bad thign," he continued, as he looked up rather superstitiously.

"What's it er sign of?" queried Dolly rather quickly.

"That yer goin' ter git er lickin' and wear
patched dudth."

The day was further spoiled for Dolly—and yet there was a sort of delight in her misery. How reprehensible was *her* conduct! How ungrateful of her not to wait! Now Shan was a hero—a paragon of gallantry. Wasn't her leaving him just awful? And yet how embarrassing to both it would have been had she waited. She thought of that and smiled at her luck.

So the fates are kinder to us sometimes, after all, than we think.

The girls walked in the woods, as Mildred came part way home with her guest. They stooped to notice the starting of the familiar flowers which they had sought all their lives—calling them by their own childish names. Later when they had bloomed they would seek them for their color merely—perchance a little for their form; but the blossom's aim in life and the mystery of the foliage shapes were not even mysteries to them; for such things had not yet provoked a thought.

Over their heads the boughs were still bare—the buds clear cut against the gray perspective

— just hinting of the coming leafiness. If they glanced up and saw a last year's bird-nest, which the foliage had hidden before, or found one, leaf-filled, in the blackberry patch, which had escaped them in their berrying, this oversight was perhaps the only element of their ignorance that they realized.

The great realm of appreciation, which might make the woods a painting or a pastoral, had not come to them. They walked in hope, of course, of the conspicuous splendor which the opening leaf and bursting petal would surely thrust upon them, but they saw nothing of the immediate beauty aside from its mere promises, and could read nothing of the rugged, insistent poetry in the bare prophecy itself. Yet they were happy in the midst of the deep content of unaroused perceptions — in the bliss of the purely animal anticipation that bounds high in those strong youthful hearts which feel that life owes them so much and pays all debts at par.

"Good-by. Don't tell nobody," said Dolly.

"Not even somebody?" said Mildred, with a sly smile.

"Of course not. If you do, I'll—" and she ran back to her friend, and setting her teeth in

mock frenzy, beat her with the soft edge of her closed fist, and swung to her. Then the two clasped each other's waists and walked further on, and kissed and said good-by again, and laughed and blushed and parted.

When Dolly passed the place where the woodcock had her nest, she turned aside to see again the drab beauty of the eggs, but they were not there, she thought. She was sure this was the place. There was the hole that she had taken the bluebells from—the conical cut of the knife. Where was the hole the nest was in? She stepped a little nearer, when, Swish! and the bird was again a hopeless invalid at her feet, and the four spotted eggs were again cooling in the late evening air.

"I reckon I didn't know how ter look," she mused. "Must be a little blind, anyway, or I'd see more'n I do—other places besides about bird-nests."

Next morning, at a rather late breakfast, Henry, who had even stayed all night at the "Jenkins-es," but had come home early to eat, remarked: —

"Seen Shan givin' his sorrel filly fits to er breakin' plough as I come by this mornin'."

(Dolly brightened. *He was able to be out.*) "Had her in 'twixt ther two mules." (Dolly rejoiced. *He was punishing her.*) "Was er usin' er ridin' plough—his father's. Wonder why? Used ter say he despised 'em, and could outwalk any team er ploughin'." (Dolly's eyes dropped into her plate. *He was still lame and couldn't walk.*) "He seems ter like er heap er things er late that he used ter didn't," he added, with a sly glance at his blushing sister. "How'd jer get home, Dolly?"

"None of your business, Smarty." And her morning meal was finished.

CHAPTER IX

"It [the thrasher's song] was the cheapest kind of top dressing in which I had faith." — THOREAU.

"The farmer diagnoses the weather daily as a doctor a patient; he feels the pulse of the wind, he knows when the clouds have a scurfy tongue, when the cuticle of the day is feverish and dry or soft and moist." — BURROUGHS.

IT was still cloudy and cool after a week of showers, as Shan sat upon the riding plough and watched the black prairie soil roll off the mould-board. Two brown thrashers, early come, were vying with each other from different portions of the hedge, which by its friendly protective cover had led them thus out on the prairie from the woods. Here and there the old, last-year's nests of these birds formed a sort of blurred bunch in the lower branches. Upon the topmost twig-tips they sat and sang charmingly to their expected mates, which had not arrived yet, of the last year's trysting-place and the pleasant anticipations of the new-year's home. Here, too, sat the logger-head shrike

—known to Shan and his neighbors as the “hedge-bird,” because he also so frequently made the tallest twigs of the Osago orange his perch while he watched for the chance mouse which the plough might turn up. From this same perch too, in the winter, the bird had pounced upon these little rodents, as Shan had shucked the shocks of corn from over their heads. The shrike’s pose was not that of sentiment or music, but rather one of watchfulness and a sort of power that seemed fully conscious of its muscularity and skill. In the thorny honey-locust here, and further down in the hedge there, were some old rude twiggy cups, which showed that the butcher as well as the harper must turn aside at times to tenderer things.

In the lower part of the hedge, where it had been laid down to make it thicker, some song-sparrows were hiding as they passed up north, and a clay-colored sparrow now and then rattled his little castanets with a sort of falling cadence as he rejoiced that this much of his journey was accomplished. At the other end of the “land,” on the low branch of an elm that had come up “volunteer” from a seed which some bird

had sown in the corner of the old worm fence, there sat a little chipping sparrow which clattered off his little "bean in the bottle" sort of song much more rapidly now than he did when Shan first heard him upon his arrival some weeks ago.

"Guess he's gettin' in a hurry for a bride," mused the boy, "and sings more hurriedly now. Plenty of time yet. See them snow-birds still flittin' their white tail feathers in the fence cracks? Can't expect no good weather while ther snow-birds are with us."

Indeed, the snow-birds were with him yet, ending their little rollicking, giggling threnodies to the winter in a sort of "chew! chew! chew!" — like a Lilliputian locomotive slipping upon its rails, — while the clear, ringing, varied tones of a passing Bewick's wren, glancing at the holes in the fence stakes, trilled a joyous ode to the spring.

Near him were some already newly married folk, still in the honeymoon of delicate attentions; for as Shan heard "the blackbirds cluck behind his plough," he turned and saw the male lift his bronzed, purplish wings, puff out his body and twang the poorly fingered string of

his guitar, with a gallant bow at his mate whenever she passed in her hunt for grubs. "He's er pretty well heeled bird—fur society," the boy mused, and cast his eye to the northwest sky. "Gittin' blustery."

Just before noon, when many "rounds" had made two twin black stripes across the field, and it was getting so much cooler that the filly tucked her head as she came up wind, Shan looked out eastward at the sky, yet clear that way, where he thought he saw some fodder-blades floating high, as if a whirlwind had caught them up.

"Goin' to have er dry spell, I reckon. Whirlwinds is er sign of that. But's funny time for a whirlwind."

Strange things were often described as "funny" in his region.

Then he noticed that the "fodder-blades" were coming on toward him, now soaring up, now down, "like a mote in heaven's eye"—and now seeming to stagger for a moment against the northwest gale.

"Can't be birds. Birds can't come erginst a wind like this and not flop. Neither could er corn-blade. Wo—ah! They *air* birds! with

nothin' but wings—that's all. Golly! Just look at that."

By this time the birds had dropped down to his ploughed land a little behind him and were dipping here and there, "like snake doctors" as Shan expressed it—without a wing-flap, however; and as they swept near, he saw one snatch up a grub, without alighting, toss it up, catch it again and swallow it. They turned, floated, rose, fell, stopped, went on again—as a feather in a giant's breath.

"If I should ever fly, I'd wanter fly like that. Wonder what kinder bird it is—and—what's it er sign of, anyway?" He looked toward the house, and high above the cherry-trees he saw a white flag floating from a pole which he had put up there. He knew what that was "er sign of"—a truce to labor for the nooning hour and a tribute to his enormous, healthy appetite. So he unhitched the team, mounted one of the mules—leaving the other and the filly to follow, and sitting sidewise, as a woman, rode humped forward in meditation.

After noon these same birds bothered him still. They swept by with their former ease, and finally left westward, sailing into the very

teeth of the gale. They seemed like eerie things of the ether — with their dusky plumage, and keen beaks stuck so directly downward as a mosquito's.

At home the boy had an old history which told of the founding of Rome, and in it was a picture of a great flight of birds represented by rows of obtuse V's, with Romulus holding his hands up at their approach. They meant so much to this old herdsman of the Palatine Hill. He wondered if these meant anything to him. And he glanced high up at the sky where the birds had disappeared.

"Why, that was a snow-flake! I allus liked snow. Makes uh felluh feel buoyant, you know. Wouldn't stop work fuh that. Get up there!"

But anon his collar began to get wet about his throat, and he grew chill and "gawmy," as he worded it; so he "took out," and went to the house.

It was an April snow in Missouri, and he was thrilled at its beauty as it clung wet to the blushing peach buds, and made the white of the pear blossoms look dull and sallow. Everywhere the sprigs of green grass stuck up

through it, and here and there the robins ran upon it and still dug at the sod beneath.

"Don't uhmount to much," the boy mused.
"Uh bird won't quit work 'nless uh storm's goin' tuh be a long un."

But he felt that he would like to talk to some one about it and about the strange birds. He wondered if Henry Simpson would know anything about them. They went away over the Simpson fields. Wonder if Henry—or anybody—saw them. Believed he would go over after supper and see.

But when his chores—"jobs" he called them—were done, and he was well across the pasture, he began to weaken in his resolution. His father had made sport of there being any such birds, and—and—"maybe Henry and *them*" would do the same. He was in no position or mood for ridicule. He looked at the Bright home, which he was now passing. There was a light in the best room, and the sub-bass of an organ groaned even out to the "big road." An inspiration struck him. He would go in and see Miss Winnie about it just a moment. She would know; and he could go over to the Simpsons' then a little later as one having authority

on the subject. He could then pretend to have come over to impart information and to see if Henry "and them" had seen the birds. It did not occur to him that "them" of the household in whom he was most interested was away at school when the "curious" birds passed.

CHAPTER X

“If you were not breathing and walking here, the most renowned poems would be ashes.” — WALT WHITMAN.

“The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us.”
— THOREAU.

“Pain is not the fruit of pain.” — E. B. BROWNING.

“Now this is very nice of you, Mr. Shan, I’m sure,” said Miss Winnie, as she shook his hand cordially in response to his timid knock.

“You don’t know how lonesome an old maid school-teacher gets away out here with nothing but birds and a few books — and — a — a very, very occasional boy — who thinks and feels. Oh, yes, — school is always present — but that doesn’t count, — that is work, you know.

“As I came home from school this afternoon you do not know how I wished for you. Snow always thrills me — not from the mere associations of a tracked rabbit or a treed coon, or of snowballing, sleighing, and all that, as with you boys; but there is something in its mazy motion that is energizing to me. Then it always seems so pure, so honest and truthful in its

records, yet so merciful in what it keeps back.
Its charity is so unostentatious."

The boy shifted himself a little as if he wished for a brake again, or felt for a lever of his plough.

"I know I am boring you, because these are the old, old things, you know, of which you have heard and read, but I really feel them and enjoy them anew at every snow like this. They are mine by appropriation and appreciation. Not all of us are geniuses, of course, but if we get up to where we can appreciate the work of genius we go partners with it, as you boys say at games. If it were not for such minds, genius would have no need to exist. Thoreau says somewhere that the loudest sounds had to thank his little ear that they existed.

"It is so of the emotions from nature. There is nothing directly creative in us. We cannot really make a blade of grass grow, of course, but if we can love and enjoy what is made, we become partners in its existence, finishers of its purposes, and almost divine, in that we make God's work exist for a great end. We are formed in His image when we can see and say of things that they are good, as He saw and said of them."

The boy was twirling his hat awkwardly. She offered to take it and lay it upon the organ, but he said it was no use; he "must be goin' dreckly."

"Yes," she babbled on, "I wish you had been with me this afternoon. I thought of you and wanted to talk to you. When I looked away up at the flakes as they seemed to fall from the very gates of heaven, I felt that if I could not talk I must shout at their inspiration; and I continued to feel so till you came."

He had felt something of the same thing and had thought of her, he said.

"I saw something this eve—"

"You know," she broke in, "you spoke of not yet seeing the beauty of the lichens. Well, if you could have seen those old elms where we saw the nuthatch the other day,—all spattered with great snow-clumps, with the brown patches of rough bark showing through, and the rugged knots and angles of the boughs all rounded and softened with the clinging flakes, till the whole perspective of the deep woods was subdued and softened, I am sure that you would have felt that there can be beauty without bald color. Why, you had one hundred and sixty acres of bright

golden-yellow Spanish needles there last fall in that fallow where you have been ploughing today. You were simply color-blinded till you are color-blind — just — just — what is it you say when a horse eats too much?"

"Foundered," said Shan. "But I saw ter-day —"

"Yes, you are just founded on color in summer — but I know I am simply boring you to death," she said, as she saw his face.

"No," said the boy — "not at all. The snow always thrills me too, but I never knew why, outside of the chance of a hunt, but there was something else yet — I didn't know what."

"I love it," she continued, "as I said, for what it tells me. It seems to come to me as a sort of confidential message, and I go to it as I do to a new book or a new friend. Its freshness rarely disappoints me, unless it should be too deep. I learn of it as I learn of you, Mr. Shan."

He straightened a little, gasped a sort of protest, but she was off again before he could become coherent. He dropped his hat upon the floor as a sort of meek surrender to the situation.

"A snow is a sort of wax tablet of a night,

set soft and yielding to hold the record of the world's doings — a kind of fossil writing — frozen history — chronicles on ice — so that he who runs may read what he who ran has written. Even the very aims and hopes and fears are recorded in the snow-tracks. You know Burroughs speaks of how the squirrel's fright is shown by his track to nearly every tree he passes, upon which he leaps to look around — "

"Yes, I know," said the boy, now aroused and upon his own ground. "I've thought of this uh little. I've seen the rabbit's track when I knew he was dodgin' the fox, for *his* cat-like dots were in the snow by the side of it, and you could see some places where he had run his sharp nose into the rabbit's prints. I've seen the mink's or weasel's four tracks all together, like you'd put your four fingers round uh straw and thrust them in the snow. Once I found uh rabbit's throat cut, Miss Winnie, and a funny thing about it — there was a weasel track goin' from it but none goin' to it. How was that?"

"Well, that *was* strange, wasn't it?" said the teacher.

"Yes," he replied; "but several years after

— one hot summer day, when I was chicken huntin' — I heard a little scream in the rag-weeds near the turnin'-row path, and there ran out in plain sight a little half-grown cottontail with a brown weasel ridin' on her back and bitin' at her throat. As they turned in again I could see the weeds wave as she run, and I shot at the motion, and when I went in, both were dead. You see in this snow-track the weasel had been ridin' his horse till it fell."

"Oh, Mr. Shan, you do help me so much. I won't give up again, but just wait and hope till I find out for myself or meet some one like you, who can instruct me. Things often puzzle me like that. One day last winter, on my way home, I cut across the cornfield because I wanted to read a little in the snow-book, and I found a peculiar mouse-track. It ended suddenly, and there were broad wing-strokes in the snow. I knew, of course, that meant a tragedy, and by the broad scratches I knew it was a hawk or owl, not a 'hedge-bird,' as you call the shrike; but as I stooped I was puzzled. There was no tail mark — "

"A short-tailed meadow mouse," interrupted Shan.

"Yes, I guess, but on each side of the track was a groove, as if something had been dragged; sometimes there appeared to be two marks on each side."

She looked up at him with a question mark in her face and found that the boy, blushing and conscious, had reached for his hat again.

"Now what have I done? Made a goose of myself as usual? Don't keep me in suspense any longer. What were these?"

"Her family," said the boy, with as large a period as possible, by means of a falling inflection, which he emphasized by rising to his feet.

"Oh!" she said, "how pitiful!" and changed the subject.

She rose as he rose to lessen the restraint and branched off upon what seemed the cruelties of nature; and having stirred up these thoughts in the boy's mind, she sought to excuse them by the same old reasoning of good coming out of evil and evil out of good, and the excuse that the law that built the one perpetuated the other.

"I know," he exclaimed eagerly, to her surprise. "As I came over here, I knocked er sheep in ther head because it was goin' ter die.

I was cruel to prevent cruelty. But why should the sheep be sick?"

"Ate too much, perhaps—violated one of nature's laws," said the teacher.

"No," said the boy. "It had grubs in its head, I guess. Acted like some that died with that last spring."

"Yes?" said the teacher.

"What bothers me is why ther grubs have got ter crawl inter the sheep's nose. Got no better place ter go, I reckon."

"Why, yes, that's it. It is a law of nature—the liberty of nature—that every creature seeks what it regards as its best place—a law that has built the world somewhat. Do you know I like the idea that at some time in its ancestral history every animal has had a choice—a bit of free-will grounded away down at the dawn of its consciousness. But we are getting into too deep water, Mr. Shan," she half apologized, as she noted his mystified yet studious look.

At last he told her of the birds he had seen that day.

"Oh, those that floated by you as you ploughed? They were black terns—I know

almost by their behavior and flight. I did not know, however, that they ever occurred so far inland."

* * * * *

"Why, yes, I could go Sunday after next — suits me very well. Is your horse perfectly safe? These steeds of yours have been playing you some queer tricks lately, you know. Better start about nine o'clock, I guess. Do come again soon, I have enjoyed your visit so much. Do you know, you always set me to thinking so! Good-night!"

It was too late now to go over to "Simpsonses."

As Shan went home, his head hot with many thoughts, he passed near the sick sheep to see if it were quite dead. To his surprise he found it standing on its feet. Next morning it was up near the barn, chewing a corn-stalk, and in a day or so it was entirely well. His mercy had taken a peculiar turn. He told neighbor Bright of his experience, and *he* knocked his one sick sheep upon the head and *it* got well. Another neighbor, further on, cured two or three in this way by jarring loose the grubs, and on the experiment went, till the last

Shan heard of it, it was careering over the county line.

"Lots er things is accerdents," he muttered some weeks after that, thinking back on this. "Who'd er thought of jarring flukes outer uh sheep's head! Law is O. K., I reckon. Can't shake uh law except with uh bigger un. Wonder if law always guides ther accerdent. Guess it does. Maybe nothin's accerdent. Maybe them birds wos sent fer sheep-saving. They didn't git me over to Simpsonses, that's sure. Law's mixt with law till a feller can't unravel it. Reckon accerdents is just God's way er givin' er chance!"

CHAPTER XI

"A man sits as many risks as he runs."

— THOREAU.

"A grateful mind by owing owes not."

— MILTON.

"While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
Runs the great circuit and is still at home."

— COWPER.

THE day after the next day, the boy was again upon his plough, and the black streak, by the end of the week, had encroached far upon the brown.

Besides the soothing rhythm of the plough's scotching sound, and the half hypnotizing fountain of rich soil that rolled, there was the ever-present interest in what the share might turn up. Once an old clevis-pin scratched on the board and made a rusty blotch on the upturned mould, and a little mystery of a last year's lost thing was cleared.

Occasionally a meadow mouse whirled out and went scampering awkwardly away, and once a shining, "blue racer" black-snake rolled up like a rope out of the region of some

small burrows, and, running sinuously, hid among the clods. One day a massasauga, or short prairie rattlesnake, was hurled well up toward him, and fell directly in the furrow behind the plough. The reptile threw itself into its well-known coil and began that beating, buzzing whir, like a tattoo upon a dead leaf — like a bee in a paper sack — like a tangled jarfly in the grass — like nothing but itself, and so distinctive that when once heard it is instantly recognized when heard again. Shan shouted "Wo-ah!" at once, and the tired mules came to an instant halt and stood patiently, but the filly snorted wildly at the rattle. With the heel of his plough-boot he bruised the serpent's head, but that menacing tail still sang for some minutes, and the filly shivered in her tracks.

He had heard it said that a snake would not die till the sun went down. He would try it with this one. Recalling his experience with the sheep, he took out his knife and cut the head off, and kicked the carcass out upon the ploughed ground that he might watch it as he passed. To clean his blade he thrust it again and again into the earth, and climbed upon his seat.

"Strange erbout ther filly," he thought. "She never saw er rattler — never was bit by one, never heard one before. 'Twas just fright at er noise, I reckon. But look at her! She's so skeered till she's gentle — seems weak from fright. Why don't ther mules keer? Funny noise! makes a fellow feel curious when a rattler comes up to see him like that un. Wonder if Miss Winnie could tell me why thuh filly knew? Guess it's just instinct, but why didn't the mules have it? 'Spect Miss Winnie'd like to see that rattle. I'll get it for her."

At the approach of the spot on the next round the mare was noticeably affected again, and even the mules seemed to sniff a down-wind odor, and show some interest. Shan wondered if it were the smell of the blood, the "pizen," or the odor of the snake itself, and why a snake had to smell like cucumbers often at this time of year.

"Wo-o-ah!"

He climbed off, put one foot upon the snake's body near where the head had been, and pulled with the hand that did not hold the lines. But there was so much stretch in the long elastic body that the rattle would not slip. He lifted

the foot and placed it near the tail, and had begun to pull hard again when the stump of the neck curled quickly backward and struck him with its bloody end squarely upon the back of the hand!

He straightened as if he had been pierced with a dart, the blood left his face—he staggered to his plough and fell, rather than sat, upon it. A cold shiver ran up his spine and a clammy sweat oozed out of every pore. He could not touch the bloody spot. He knew not what to do with it—it seemed so cursing, so blighting, so venomous. The hand hung limp as if paralyzed. In a few moments he regained his self-possession, stooped for a dry clod, crumbled it upon the place, took out his knife and scraped the gory mud away. He put more dust upon it, scraped that away, spat on the spot, wiped it on his pants vigorously, cleaned the knife-blade in the usual way, and going forward, he stooped in between the mules, and laid his arm over the filly's neck. A fellow-feeling had made him wondrous kind.

After a few rounds, he began to smile at the joke of his fright, though it was long before his throat ceased to feel a queer dryness. He could

not help feeling that he had had a wondrous escape, and in the exuberance of his gratitude his heart warmed toward everything.

A prairie horned lark had already built her nest in a snug little excavation, flush with the bare earth — evidently since the stubble was burnt. Shan had seen her dart away, crouched low as she ran, and then fly, sufficiently often to note the eggs finally, and to shy the "land" mule and the filly off from them. When the plough, after a few more rounds, came to it, he got off, threw his levers and glided around the little "dug out" home, leaving it safe among the peaks and ranges of the lifted clods.

In another place the filly's foot had scraped a furry cover from a last year's horse-track, in which a mother hare had hidden her family of seven. Shan had just time to shout "Wo-o!" as even "the cellar and the well" of the little rodents' home began to climb the mouldboard's slope. He backed out, slid his plough around again, and stopped to look with a boy's interest at the little furry forms which kept constantly shivering and diving one beneath the other.

"Wonder what that little white spot's in their foreheads for now and not when they get

fully grown? Kind mother these little fellers have. Takes off her old cloze to wrap her babies in. Reckon that's what made the old 'molly' I saw this mornin' look so ragged. Lined this whole horse-track with fur. Who'd uh thought uh rabbit could felt like that! It's nearly as good as my Sunday hat. It just fits to a T, too. Well, little buns, I'll just cover you up again, and old Pont sha'n't come with me any more to chase your mother."

And he spread the blanket over them again, and left the whole mass jerking as if it had taken its strychnine a little too strong. When he passed it on the next round it was still throbbing as one lump — all having fallen into unison.

"Funny about er little rabbit jumpin' so much in his bed. Guess he's just practisin' the art uh bein' skeered. He lives that way. Maybe he's practisin' his hind legs too," he added, as he clucked to his team, and went on, imagining the mother coming to them that night over the clods to relieve their hunger, make up their bed, cover them up, and tuck them in again for another day of orphanage. Even a mole that he ploughed up he let go, though he usually killed all he met.

At the further end of the field a little "draw" or branch, that was fringed with crabs and wild plums, ran as a brook in the wet spring, and in it, later, the water stood in the little washed-out pools. Under a fall, where the sod had held as a bench, while the dirt beneath was cut away, was one cool expanse, shaded from the sun by the overhanging shelf of roots, and blue as the sky with the particles of drab clay yet held in suspension. Shan sprawled himself to drink of this and then walked back over a little bit of swamp where the crawfish had built their mud-chimneys high up around their burrows.

He picked off a hardened lump of clay and dropped it down one to find, by listening, how far it was to the water. He recalled a day last year upon the prairie swamps, while snipe-shooting, when all the water was warm and slimy, how the cool blue of that in the crawfish wells, only a few inches out of reach, had tantalized him. The memory made him so thirsty that he went back to the pool and drank again.

As he again started for his plough he noted some of the crawfish, at his approach, drop back from the mouths of their homes; and a little further on were the case and legs of one of the

diggers drying in the sun. He glanced up, and a little way off a sparrow-hawk was hovering about thirty feet up, and Shan wondered how he ever caught his game.

"Wind's from the south," he said. "Er hawk always hovers against the wind."

But just then a crawfish was crawling at his feet, and picking it up, he found clasped beneath its rear flipper her whole family of thirteen young.

"Movin'," muttered the boy. "'Spect that's the way the hawk gets his dinner. Well, I'll take care of you."

And taking her further on in the way she was going, he chucked her into what appeared to be an unoccupied hole. Some one once had given him such a mother for a pet. He had put her in a vessel of water and she freed her young. But one day when he forgot her supply of angle-worms, he was disgusted to find that she had eaten her whole family.

Then he went back again upon the plough, content with himself, feeling that he had been a benefactor; and round after round of sameness lulled his powers of observation and set his fancy free. He was as mechanical as the head-

less snake, and threw the levers, pulled the lines, pressed the pedals, and clucked as though hand and foot and tongue had separate souls.

There was the long stretch of the future down the furrow's length, with here a farm, and there a home upon it, with sloping lawn and herds and flocks afield and waving crops—and comfort. There were episodes dramatic down the line, where he was his neighbor's leader—always right—influenced only by the right; for a bad conscience is not ideal—scarcely imaginable—only real. Sometimes he broke out in loud soliloquy, and he found his tired team stop at some full round O-tone, which, if they had not stopped, he would have sworn he had not uttered. Impatiently he would shout, "Go on!" and lapse again into fancy.

Through all his reverie there was the bright, flushed little face which always looked his way and smiled, while the two braids, with their bits of ribbon at their tips, hung down her back, and the white bib of her apron was pinned at her shoulders. Imagination might paint the future all mature and complete in the comfort that time only brings, but age upon her face or the lack of vigor in his own strong step could find no place.

Not even children came into his picture—much as his heart had always warmed toward them. His fancy never went that way, and all his relations to her in his dream were just as they had been when all his heart went out to her at her finger's touch beneath his eye. She was ever the same sweet maiden of his first awakening, and all that hope seemed now to hint was that he might pull her almost into him some day, as one hugs a babe, and feel her scared heart beat on his.

On earth few things are purer than the first love of a boy. It is the incarnation of devotion. There is no query in his mind about the social standing, the wealth, or the intellectual or other attainments of his sweetheart. All he considers is that he loves her—the compatibilities may go to the winds, and the congruities as well. He banks his admiration on whatever has first aroused him—the curve of the neck, the round of the cheek, the flash of the eye or the sweep of its lash, the cut of the mouth, the color of the lip, or the rippling play of dimples anywhere. Whatever it is, it is all-sufficient. He fairly revels in the glory of her imperfections, without any after-considerations whatever.

To him she stands as the expression of all purity. In her presence he himself is pure by association—or reflection, rather; away from her he is pure by imagination and hope. The love of a girl herself cannot excel it—especially in its exhibition. The boy's ardor knows no restraints—his one motive is possession; it considers no proprieties, for in its single outlook there are none. But the girl must watch and ward, not only the violation of her training, but those advances which the delicacy of her instincts forbids. The very conditions of her relations to her lover provoke a shyness that is itself inconsistent with the abandon of devotion. She has to avoid, in her own mind, the tendency of being too easy a conquest, and outwardly, the consequences of too bold a step; so that she steels her heart, and, with coy deception, withdraws her hand. But the boy, with only the restraints of the purity inherited from her sex and of the gallantry inherent in his own upon him, grasps as a baby at the light.

We prate much of our growth away from the merely animal, and of the great gap that lies between; we talk largely of our altruism as the reflex result of our rational and religious restraint,

but love, growing out of the necessary conditions of the persistence and progress of life, base, yet self-denying and sacrificing, in the very essentials of organisms, may, as it moves the great round world, lift humanity toward the angels yet.

The white flag had been streaming long above the cherry-tree when Shan looked up. His mind had been so occupied that it had not heeded the hints which the stomach had sent up — though he could recall now that the mules had turned reluctantly for the last hour at the hither end of the field.

CHAPTER XII

"A life fed by the bounties of earth and sweetened by the
airs of heaven." — JERROLD.

"Mute the voice of rural labor, hushed
The plow-boy's whistle and the milk-maid's song."
— GRAHAME.

AT heart every man is a gambler, as he should be. The man who does not believe in luck — the bit of fortune God has set aside for him — is a fool; and he who does not risk and trust his own is a failure.

After this, Shan was nearly crazy to see Dolly. The last interview had been so unsatisfactory. But he had not yet the courage to go over there. On Saturday, as he stood upon the old wooden check-marker, made like a wide, short, three-runner sled, he felt that in some way he must manage again to fall in with her. He thought of haunting the road home from school, but this would be more pointed than a visit — at least, more public. What business, anyway, had a conscientious, industrious boy

lounging along a country road, two miles or more from home, at this stirring season? Besides, all the children in the neighborhood would be along with her, and nothing tattles like a child, except—but he thought again of Dolly, and didn't say “er woman.”

But there was the April meeting at Walnut Grove to-morrow!

“By George! That's ther ticket. Henry and Dolly always go and eat dinner with their aunt, Mrs. Jordan. I'll go over to her house and stay all night. No, that won't do—looks too plain again. Goin' back ter dinner would look too pointed and spongy, after stayin' all night. Nobody there, anyway, that's company fer a feller. Tom's too young and lazy, and Sallie's too—too—awful ugly. Then she might think I was shinin' to her, and stir up things.”

But at night as he drew the “marker” out upon the “turnin'-row,” one thing was settled: that he would go over to Walnut Grove to-morrow, and that he would not ride the filly. He would trust to luck about getting to Dolly—maybe ride home with her again—always an awkward boy's hope—maybe fall in with her going. He would cast himself in the way

of opportunity again as he cast the seed into the soil in the reach of sun and shower.

The morrow dawned a typical rural Sabbath. Sunday seems more to the farmer than to most laborers. It is not only the day upon which he may rest, but one from which he may and does reckon. Last Sunday the field was a burnt fallow, to-day mellow and marked ready for the planter. With Sunday he dates the past and notches the progress of his work, and with it he punctuates the present and lowers the horizon of the future. It is to him a literal Sabbath—not the first day of the week, but the last—not the beginning, but the ending, of undertakings.

In the spring and summer, when the winter feeding is over, it has a tranquillity in rural life that is not the mere suspension of all activity—a tranquillity found in no other industry. As on this day the farmer walks around his growing crops or strolls through his grazing herds, Nature seems to be running her own affairs and all human interests besides. If he sits in the shade simply, and gazes at the vales and hills, silent in the great sweep of distance, still the mother earth seems, as she rests, to bare her

bosom, round and mammary, to give sustenance to man and beast. In the growing time of year, Sunday appears to have more benevolence in it than even in the autumn; for there is not anywhere the hint of failure along with the hope of fruit, and the divine and boundless energy seems to stride insistent now while it lies measured and expended then.

It was a good way over to Walnut Grove. One must start early. A country boy can scarcely be too early at church—not too early on the way, at least. He can loiter pleasantly or gossip before the service opens. So Shan spurred up Ben, the bay saddle-gelding, into a rapid fox-trot, that he might not be late.

But suddenly he slowed up. He was approaching the lane that came out from the Simpson home. No horses were hitched at the front fence, ready to go. In the lot was the blazed-face horse that Dolly sometimes rode, though she might be on Bill again. But he knew Bill's track—his overreach even, and here was only one track going out of the mouth of the lane—that of Henry's horse. Dolly was at home—and—and—(he brought Ben to a stop). No, he couldn't go in. Maybe she

had gone over yesterday evening and was now at her aunt's. So he touched Ben with his spur, and had to hold his hat as the horse racked rapidly.

But he slowed up again suddenly at a memory. He recalled how several years ago, when this piece of road was new and stumpy, he and Henry had seen old man Huffman—Herman Huffman—going after his second wife, the widow Worman's daughter. Mr. Simpson had then just turned the road around the new-cut patch at the corner of the field, and, with the usual economy, had left the stumps high for time to rot down and the wagon wheels to knock out. The boys had heard the rumble of the great wagon-box away up the lane, and Henry had said:—

"Shan, I bet that's old Hoffman goin' fer his new wife. I know his wagin's rattle; ther weddin's ter-day, yer know. Guess he'll stop that gait when he strikes ther new-cut place."

But he didn't. Herman had no spring-seat. He had simply provided himself with a great deal of ardor, two chairs, and a hickory with. One chair he sat in; the other knocked about behind him in apparent glee at its mission. The

boys bent double with laughter as he passed in his wild enthusiasm, bouncing with the stumps — his elbows, flapping like featherless wings, held far out from his body, his with whacking frequently at his sweating team, and the chair dancing tipsy fandangos, often on one leg, behind him. Sometimes he seemed about to take a flight himself over the horses' backs as the wheels struck an unusually high stump, and finally his end-gate dropped out without his knowledge, and, when last seen by the boys, the lady's chair was skipping dangerously near the opening.

"Ho up," Shan had said, "I'll not make er fool of myself like that," as he thought of the incident. "I ain't goin' fer no wife—exactly — but," and he pulled Ben in.

When he reached the "Grove," — that had not a walnut in it — the boys were already standing around in groups, and many pairs were arriving at the stiles which stood out in a little open place apart from the building. The edifice was new yet, and, like Thoreau's cabin, had "unfenced nature right up to the sill."

Shan glanced at the woods, and reassured himself that the Simpson horses were not there,

and he felt a bit of pride in the acuteness of his observation. Shortly Henry and Sissy Jenkins came riding up. Then the slight hope that he *might* be mistaken fled and left him sad — for Dolly would not be there, perhaps.

But only a few minutes lapsed, when he saw Sol Jenkins' roan mare come prancing up the rise from the creek, and under her the flaunt of a long riding-skirt which he knew, and his heart went into his heels; for Dolly was not upon one of her father's horses, but upon a dashing, spirited, young, black gelding, which was Sol's particular pride, and was known far and wide as the fast single-footer of the region. Evidently Sol had laid his plans deeply. Dolly had gone over to Sissy's and stayed all night.

All that day Shan struggled for ease of appearance, but it came not. In the reaction of his desperation it seemed more important than ever that he speak to Dolly — to remind her of his existence. To save his life he could not think what he should utter, if he had a chance. As she swept into church she bowed in such a general way to the group he was in that he could not feel that he was even recognized.

"Say, boys," said one, "that Simpson girl's a stunner, ain't she? Never saw er girl come out so."

"Deuced fine looking specimen," said another, who had just that morning read the phrase in a story.

"Sol Jenkins seems ter be pretty solid there, or tryin' to be," said a third. "Old man kinder likes him, too, they say. Got ser much 'git up.'" And Shan went in to the sermon — not that he cared for it, but that he could not stand the boys any longer.

Sol was far enough away from home to go in and sit with his girl. Besides, this newer church house had only one front door, which made it easier. Perhaps he had seen Shan and his hungry look, and had determined that there should be no "cuttin' out" this day.

Shan was nearly desperate, and strange foolish schemes began again to rise in him. He slipped out of the door during the first song after the dreary sermon, and stood ready for any emergency that might throw him near the girl. Shortly after him came Tommy Jordan — Dolly's cousin.

Tommy was about fifteen years old, large and

sleepy, bored by every sort of exertion and fond of nothing but his bed and his seat at the table. He was wide awake, however, to the extra labor which the April meeting always brought upon him in the way of taking care of the company's horses, bringing chips, wood, water, and in the general hustle which his mother and sister put him through on this occasion.

An idea suddenly flashed on Shan. It was not a new idea, but the opportunity for its exercise was unexpected. He would ask Tommy to go home with him, when, of course, since he could not leave company, Tommy would return the compliment by saying, "Can't ter-day. Got comp'ny. You come go'me 'ith me;" whereupon he would accept—very reluctantly, of course. The scheme had worked often, and was a well recognized yet courteous form of self-invitation everywhere.

So Shan stepped up and said: "Tom, come go home 'ith me."

"Don't kef-fi-do," said Tommy, and, catching Shan by the arm and turning toward the woods, he continued nervously:—

"My haws is hitched there by that burr oak. Where's yo'r'n. Let's git off 'fo maw comes out

and sees me!" And though Shan was slow, in the hope that "maw" might come out and see Tommy, yet he soon found himself riding homeward, five weary miles, directly away from where he wished to be, with no prospect of any one for company that afternoon except this vealy boy.

Tom stayed all night, of course, feeling that he must accept Shan's hospitality in the broadest spirit.

CHAPTER XIII

"There is a tide in the affairs of men, but there is no gulf-stream setting forever in one direction." — LOWELL.

"Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts, God will see that you do not want society." — THOREAU.

"Friendship is love without his wings." — BYRON.

"His maiden . . . was heaven while he pursued her as a star. She cannot be heaven if she stoops to such a one as he." — EMERSON.

IT was before the days of wire check-rowers or automatic drilling attachments to corn-planters—in fact, before drilling corn was considered practical at all in Missouri. The idea that the weeds could not be kept down unless the plough ran both ways still prevailed. For this reason some one—usually a light boy—sat forward on the planter and threw a lever, now one way, now the other, as the cross-marks or furrows were passed.

There were boys and boys at this business. The early machines let the grain fall from a box about eighteen inches up, and as it fell it travelled forward, as a projectile, with the same

speed as the team. The lever, therefore, must be thrown a little before reaching the check, to compensate this motion, and it required a skilled hand and head. It had in it all the elements of expert wing-shooting, which aims so far ahead of the flying bird.

Charlie Watkins, Mildred's twelve-year-old brother, was renowned for his accuracy, and all day he had sat upon the hard platform in front of Shan, and the "clack! clack!" of his lever had never ceased, except when he got off at the ends to set over the flag stakes, while Shan threw up the runners to turn around. Thus the day had gone with a strain of attention on each too tense for talk. Shan's eyes were upon the stakes to keep the rows straight, as he drove, and the boy's were upon the pointer that curved over so suggestively toward the checks.

One afternoon, however, when turning, the boy had thrown out a hungry bid for some sort of praise of his skilled checking, whereupon Shan complimented him, but added, with the arrogance of a few years' seniority, that the boys now knew nothing of the skill of dropping corn which prevailed before the planter had

been introduced. He reminded Charlie how expert his sister Mildred had been, while he was a tot in dresses yet, when, out of her gathered-up apron, she could drop behind a shovel-plough, as it laid the furrow off, as fast as a horse could walk, every hill at perfect check and never holding less than three, or more than five, grains. He told him of a dropping match between himself and Mildred, in which she had fairly won—her deft slim fingers outdoing his thick clumsy ones; and he thought again to himself how sweetly and modestly she had taken her victory—not as a matter of course, but as a great accomplishment that she had outdone him at anything.

He began to think further, how in all his life this girl had been like a sister to him, how he had confided to her his distresses, and she had soothed him with her consolation. As the sun sank into the fringe of woods that at the west seemed sheared off so square and level, Shan made the last broad wheel-stripes upon the cloddy waste, and the field was finished. When Charlie started home, a few minutes later, Shan called to him to "Tell Milly I'll be over at you-all's house after supper."

Strange that he could be so free and easy with Mildred. He'd give his filly if he could say that in that way to Henry Simpson. Maybe he could some day. Maybe! But he could not feel it yet.

He did not even dress up to visit Mildred. No, he had won from her all he had ever hoped. Dress is the price we pay for the things we feel we cannot purchase by other means. It is the confession of our poverty in better coin—the tacit acknowledgment of a poor circulation of head and heart. He went over in his old working “round-about.”

Although he said “Howdy, Milly!” very carelessly, and she, “Why, howdy, Shan!” in her old open way, his manner was not so easy as his clothes. The restraint of his mission was upon him and was evident in a moment to the girl.

“Shan McBride, you’re not yourself tonight. What’s the matter with you? You’re not yourself anywhere here lately. Why, gettin’ in love don’t seem ter paralyze everybody as it does you.”

“Why, who said I was in love?”

“Oh, nobody. Nobody don’t have ter say

it. It just says itself. Come, Shan, you can't fool your old friend, nor nobody else, fer that matter. Didn't everybody see you runnin' your filly ter death ter catch up with a certain body Sunday before last? Oh, pshaw! Runnin' off! Stuff! Now, Shan McBride, fer a boy who is noted in all this country fer bein' able ter ride anything that has hoofs, ter talk that uh way is ridiculous. Couldn't help it! I don't blame yeh. Nobody does, I reckon — nobody who's got any sense. Only you take it too hard, some way. In your case it don't seem ter break out right."

The measles were prevalent. "Well, what of it? I know she didn't. She ought ter uv waited a moment, but she couldn't think. She thought you could ride a zebrey. She *was* hurt about it and felt sorry. These sort of affairs seem to hurt everybody that catches 'em — except Sol Jenkins. He seems ter keep cool."

Mildred had mentioned Jenkins not with meanness, but for a certain purpose.

"I don't see any signs of *her* sufferin'," said Shan, not yet willing to drag Sol into it.

"Well, that's all you know about it. Of course a girl can't go round wearin' mournin'

because a feller's filly won't pass his own gate, or go over and patch his pants, so's he can come ter see her. Girls 's got a little modesty well as boys sometimes. Why don't you go over ter see her and have it out?"

"I know that bothers you, and it bothers me. I can't tell you why, except I love her, and something about her makes me feel ser mean and little. I guess that's always ther case in the presence of things we adore. I not only love Dolly, I could just worship ther hem of her dress."

"Tell me something I don't know."

"I couldn't tell you why if you asked me. I don't *admire* her as I do you and others. She would never make ther friend that you do. She lacks many of ther noble traits that you have, and some of ther accomplishments that others show. Miss Winnie, of course, impresses me as bein' her superior in many ways. Ain't it strange that we can love where we can't endorse? I know Dolly's frailties — know they are there yet, I've seen 'em in her childhood—and yet I'd give my right arm to know her mine to-night.

"Why don't I ask her? I just couldn't. I'd

rather live in doubt and hope than in ther despair er bein' rejected. She might scorn me as I may deserve. I've no claims upon her regard ; you know that. Father opposed ther change of road that Mr. Simpson made, and when the school district was divided, he and father were upon opposin' sides. Henry and I have drifted away from each other. Dolly still cherishes ther little feelin's of ill-will against me that she showed as er child. She teased me th'other day about Lizzie Williams in the old mean way. I guess I'm such a fool that I fell in love with her because she tried ter help me get my mule colt ter foller, and anybody would uh done that."

Mildred started to protest, but he continued :

" Besides, Milly, I'm er sort of fatalist. Oh, not just the blind chance sort, yer know, but ther fatalism that has God's guidance behind it, but never in sight. If accerdents, like double-trees and brass kettles, er mud-splash and er foolish colt, can so involve my heart, I've a sort of feelin' some way that accerdent ought tuh see me out."

Mildred smiled at this as she thought also of the barbed-wire episode, but looking up she saw his face very serious as he continued :—

"Sometimes I fear to exert my will too much — free as I feel it is — for fear — especially in this thing — I may get outside er ther order of God's purposes for my good. Man fell that way, you know. I've thought of that uh good deal. I know He expects me ter work in every other way, but I have always felt that He would send me a wife in ther line of His own choice. It may be by some accerdent — and — and" (his voice broke), "I just love and wait."

"But — but —" stammered Mildred.

"But in the mean time I just suffer, too, I tell yer. If I only knew that Dolly cared for me er little — if I could only hope that God might throw my reward that way —" And he looked so scrutinizingly and pitifully into Mildred's eyes that she threw her apron up over her face and turned away.

"But, Shan," she said, "you don't think you should wait for Dolly ter speak first, do you?"

"I don't mean just that," he said. "I don't know what I *do* mean. Something seems ter say ter me, 'Wait.'"

There was a strong temptation for Mildred to tell him of Dolly's visit and all that it meant, but she held Dolly's joking promise sacred and

restrained herself. But her heart smote her as she looked into this lover's eager face. She smiled a sort of apology to him as she said:—

"If you fear too much ter press your destiny outside of yourself or ter strain ther course of ordinary happenin's, it would be very, very wrong for me ter put myself forward into your life and fate. You would not like for me ter try ter do what you yourself will not attempt. I can only wish you well."

"I might consider you as an accerdent," said Shan, smiling faintly.

"Yes, but you came over here uh purpose to put me inter this affair. Let your fate—not you—use me as it will. I could tell you some things, of course. You knew that when you came. One thing you are entitled to, and that is that Dolly knows your worth, and has lost all those little spiteful feelin's you were speakin' of. She is better than you think. But she is no better than I've always known you ter be."

And in her sympathy she reached out and touched him upon the head, as he held it, as if in despair, between his hands. In an instant he lifted his face and kissed her on the cheek.

These two young persons were not in love with each other, of course, for each knew where the other stood, but there was a sweet feeling of friendship between them — Platonic or not — which was more than any that could ever exist between man and man or girl and girl. It may be that it was the sex of soul, which, leaving the sex of body behind, reached out to grasp its fellow's hand. Certainly there are many such friendships, with this finer insight of one life into another life, where the sweetheart feeling never comes; or else the heart does not always know its own. Often it may be just fellow-suffering or enjoyment.

To the boy in love there comes no other such comforter, and he never fails to render to this friend the homage that is hers.

Perhaps with her there enters something of the old match-making feeling that is in us all, which parades itself as a factor of bonds built in the skies, and exalts us, in this respect at least, into partnership with the angels in wishing good-will to the sons and daughters of men. Few things remain so pure to us, and, while often misdirected, few actions have their motives so unselfish and sincere. “All the world loves

a lover," and Mildred slept little that night for fear these lovers might miss each other in their fate.

Shan rode home under the stars with a new feeling in his heart—but it was the old, old thing with boys. He would do something that would provoke attention,—nay, admiration,—and compel an expression, in some way, of Dolly's love. Yes, there was a vista where Dolly was doing him homage as many others were, and he had taken her to his heart with condescension—had won her without wooing. Mingled with his great love now there crept in a kind of enjoyment of her humiliation, the old, old slime of vanity—just as jealousy may mingle hatred with the noblest emotion.

As he turned into his home he felt large already with his ambitions, and he almost snatched the old dragging, creaking gate off its hinges—so vigorous is a healthy hand when stimulated by a desperate yet hoping heart. All night long he lay awake, though dreaming out the details of his future; and he had so far forgotten his creed that he had determined to carve out his career by the sheer force of his will, in spite of destiny.

He worked the remnant of the week with a roused spirit, yet he lost his interest a little in the affairs of the farm, as he thought how next fall, when he was twenty-one, he would leave for college and begin a higher life.

K

CHAPTER XIV

"There is throughout Nature something . . . that leads us on and on, but arrives nowhere." — EMERSON.

NEXT Sunday morning Shan, having borrowed a buggy from a neighbor, "ter take the teacher ter town in," hitched Ben, the reliable, to it, and he and Miss Hudson started to the county seat to hear her old friend, Mr. Witmer, preach. It was one of those indescribable April mornings when all the promises of Nature seem about to be paid, and earth and air are solvent. The leaves of the woods were not full-sized yet, but they had swelled wonderfully since yesterday, and there was a tone in the still visible branches above that hinted the flooding sap. The tender verdance upon the earth beneath was so clean and fresh that one felt newly made with the season.

Shan felt the inspiration, but was reflective as they drove. Some commonplaces had passed when the teacher said, simply to rouse the boy: —

"Do you know, I'm just intoxicated with a morning like this, rejuvenated, made over! I feel as if I never had a memory—that all the past is blank, and that I am just beginning an everlasting Now. It could not be, of course, but I feel now as if life should be an eternal spring or that I should be like the oriole up there. He has come up from the tropics in one long greening April, winging in on one continuous wave of opening bud and bursting catkin. He loiters till the insect life wakes with the tender leaf, and beats his way up northward with the hum of gauzy wings. He is a bird of opportunity. Perhaps the migratory instinct is as strong in him as others—often stronger—but he waits, till Nature leads him on with a pillar of shine by day and a pillar of green by night."

"That's about my theory of life," Shan replied, "ter go where circumstance and Nature leads. Of course, uh man's above uh bird, but it seems that he'd be happy as a bird if he stopped worrying about his progress and followed just what he felt. Nature might be kind to him then as she is to the beasts. A bird or a hog knows when its goin' to rain or turn cold often, but I didn't know enough this morning to

tell me whether I ought ter bring an overcoat er a fan. Nature guides the bird, but leaves me ter draw uh conclusion — often from a very poor knowledge of the facts."

"I think you put it too severely, Mr. Shan," she said, noting the desponding tone in his voice; "there's that blue-bird there; I think he was here in February singing that same song, and that he got caught in some cold snaps. Some years he fails to go far enough south and gets killed by the unusual sweep of a cold wave beyond his winter home, as we were once saying. At the first flash of vernal sun among the bare boughs of his old home, he hies northward to greet it with his song, and seems, unlike the oriole, to help Nature make the spring. He and all the early comers found their faith in her very hints, and take her on trust, as you do when you sow your seed. They do not wait for compulsion. They are forcing Nature somewhat to their wills. Why, do you know, many tender birds are learning to brave our winters here? It is true they all fail sometimes. How could faith exist if fruition always lay at the front door? When the conditions indicate, the bird puts itself in the way of Nature's opportunities,

and trusts and works. Doing this is doing well."

Shan, of course, had been in town often before, but never on Sunday. He was much impressed with the quiet of things. The rush of business, the loud guffaw of the lounger, and the Saturday bawl of the auctioneer as he proclaimed in the most public place the age, sex, sexual condition, and probabilities of the stock he sold—all these were missing. The street-corner cigar store and the Sunday baseball club had not rivalled the Sunday-school in attractiveness and attendance yet.

He had gone in with Miss Hudson, and sat impressed with the great stretch of the congregation away up to the pulpit. As the choir up front arose, he was sure that he had never before had so many persons sing directly at him, and he found himself wondering where the Lord got his praises. The impression that these persons were on exhibition for his benefit embarrassed him. Then one of the choir-girls bent her book back so far that he suffered—a book being such a sacred thing to him. She seemed to do it to show that she was professional. Another evidently had a friend on the bench

behind him, to whom she nodded and smiled and almost giggled. Once she had to take a kink or two in her neck to keep from "snorting right out," as Shan expressed it, when telling it at home. He felt at first that she was aiming this at him. In all his nature-study he had never met the grinning choir-girl—nor read of her. At that time her literature was small, but her evolution was complete.

CHAPTER XV

“What I aspired to and was not comforts me.”

—BROWNING.

“Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.”

—SHAKESPEARE.

“One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.”

—WORDSWORTH.

So absorbing were all the things to be seen, that Shan did not know just when Mr. Witmer took his text or what it was. He remembered a sort of haze of general statements, then something about a gun aroused him, and thoughts somewhat like these stayed with him:—

“Aiming high is a fine beginning. It is the duty of every beginner. Quite likely he may even then hit below the point in sight, but he would not have shot so high with lower sighting. This is an old figure. Everybody knows it—uses it to stimulate ambition. High aim within limits means long range. But it takes a genius to tell where the ball will strike. We think of

Lee at Mexico, and Foote of Fort Henry, and we are thrilled; but Lees and Footes are not every-day fellows.

"Recently a great gun was trained in England. The conditions were given. A prize was offered for the closest calculation as to where the ball would fall. The great projectile swept fifteen miles. A hundred feet was the closest estimate, and all the world clapped its hands. But it was a bad miss at best. Some of the estimates were wrong by miles. A city might have been struck, but at point-blank tacks may be driven and hairs cut. After all, the best work is the work of precision.

"Do not discourage yourself with your aiming. Many of us can aim too high; our ideals may be too far beyond our capacity. There is a medium, too, which is the maximum—well known in mathematics. If you aim directly up, look out! The ball may fall back on you. You had better aim too low than too high. That is heresy, isn't it, but I am talking of work. If you cannot do precise work, you can aim lower still—using the ricochet—with the ball bounding and rebounding on the ground in dangerous plunges, ploughing through every

obstruction. Anybody can do good work at this. Our enemies are low down, close at hand with most of us—not out of sight or beyond their ramparts. Ours is the direct express shooting—if not that, the ricochet.

“Then we should not try to load too heavily. If the projectile weighed the more, the load would shoot the gun. We, and not the enemy, would suffer. There is a nice adjustment of self to weapon, or weapon to self, when we have the choosing. David could do nothing with Saul’s armor, but with a sling he could slay a giant. You may not be able to handle a mortar, but at short range any one is dangerous with a shot-gun.”

Some one came tiptoeing up the aisle, touched a doctor on the shoulder, who took up his hat and cane and, with great dignity and creaking shoes, bent low and went out. The whispering and giggling crowd upon the rear seats straightened themselves suddenly and looked demure and innocent at the minister’s sudden stop.

“I was pruning my grapes the other day,” he began again, “and burning the useless branches. How strongly the figure of the Mas-

ter came back to me, 'He purgeth it.' There was the ambitious lateral that wanted to run away up to the tree tops, or out horizontally and bear fruit away from home, for all vines tend to bear toward the tip. But I cut it back, because the clusters grown near the root are better. Thus the branch is held within the circle of its greatest usefulness.

"Somehow we do not do our best unhampered. There is no free and easy way to do good. To pull well we must be harnessed. To return to our vine, if we are unrestrained we go too much to length and leaf — to woody fibre. Vines cannot prune themselves. We might cut off our spreading tendencies, but we will not. Hence the need of some one else outside of self with shears and loving foresight, to put our effort where it does the best.

"I am late pruning my grapes this year. I have done them that injustice. They are weeping tears of sap as if conscious of their loss; but these same tears soon heal the wounds and dam themselves till they surge back into the shorter stocks, and strike the roots into deeper and fresher soil.

"There is this mounting ambition in us all,

brethren — this reach so far away that performance fails in aspiration. How many of us fret beneath the burden of the commonplace, and feel that we should be greening among the tree tops, when God has simply blighted the tendrils of our ambitions that we may bear fruit low down where there is so much need of it! How much the limit set upon us may enlarge our capacities for refreshing others! Doubtless in a double sense, God, in thwarting many of our hopes, is caring for his own."

Miss Winnie heard Shan loose a long breath in a sighing expiration, and when their eyes met, he had a glowing, wondering face. The minister shifted his notes a little, looked at his watch, cleared his throat, put a troche in his mouth, and resumed in a rather subdued tone:

"I burnt some other things yesterday. All morning I scraped up dead weeds. They were cumbering the ground and would hinder plough and hoe, and keep out the warm sun and drying wind. But it isn't that which worries me, for they will burn or rot, but it is the quantity of seed that I see in the 'Jimpson' pods and in the fuzzy spikes of the hog-weeds. At every touch these shower down where others have

fallen, and in spite of care now, I am sowing trouble for the summer.

"Penitence is good, of course, in its place, but abstinence is better. The weeds will grow this summer in spite of present grief, which will only make the hoe-stroke harder. Penitence may prevent the further sowing, but it cannot unsow the sown. It was my duty to never let the weed seeds ripen; I ceased too soon my last year's battle. Eternal vigilance is the price of our release from the bondage of bad tendencies as well as the price of liberty. Perhaps my garden will never be clean again, because of this neglect; for some of these plants are perennial, like the docks, and strike their starchy roots far beneath the reach of plough and hoe, and sprout again from merest fragments. With the others, some of the seeds lie dormant more than a year, and sprout when surroundings suit.

"Sometimes a young man sows 'wild oats'—so called—in his youth, in view of an expected long life for penitence. But though the scattering may cease, if God perhaps may give the opportunity, the seeding still goes down the ages. The men who introduced the English

sparrow were doubtless sorry for it, but my currant buds are being destroyed daily, just the same.

"I do not know how it will be in heaven. God may have some way of destroying the impetus of a bad deed, if penitence shall save us. But how can penitence ever save us from remorse, unless our memories are blighted, and we lose our past and begin as new creatures in the other life. It's a saddening thought — this eternality of facts and deeds — just alone — unmultiplied, unintensified. But then, a fact begetting facts, a deed engendering deeds, seeds from seeds — weeds from weeds! The thought is awful, unless the deeds be right!"

There was some coughing and clearing of throats as the preacher paused, and many looked around to see on whom the remarks most fittingly fell — while a long swell of rustling fabrics and shuffling feet spoke the readjustment of rest. The whisperers on the back seat had been listening open-mouthed.

Shan feared that the sermon had stopped for good, but —

"With a bit of the botanist about me," the preacher resumed, "I recall the history of some

of the weeds whose stems I am burning. Besides the native denizens of our soil, many of the weeds we fight are foreigners. The purslane, the plantain, the curled dock, the dandelion, all claim European birth—perhaps came over in the *Mayflower*. You know the 'Jimpson' got its name from Jamestown.

"How easy it is to take on other tendencies than those already in our nature, and how we may burden our souls with more trials than were designed for us! Life at best is a fight with weeds—the primal curse of 'thorns and thistles,' but it is enough to fight the cockle-burr and the horse-nettle without the cottonweed and the burdock.

"Think a moment and note, as a social whole and as individuals, the evils that we have introduced into our lives: Tastes for whiskey, beer, tobacco; love for the brutality of the prize-ring, the race-course, and the so-called manly college-sport; a craving for the mawkish sentiments and prurient suggestions of poor fiction, and the frothy excitement of the poor drama. Much of these we have cultivated against nature, and what is worse still, against our best training and culture."

There was a slight rustle again in the congregation. The brother who chewed, and spat amber on the carpet, thought of the brother whose spirituous breath came over his shoulder from a rear pew; and she with a paper-backed French novel of the most prurient type laid open face downward on her dresser, so as not to lose the place, turned with a lifted lip toward the sister whose husband's horse could go under 2.25.

"Another thought or so, and I am done," the pastor said, closing his Bible and putting the hymn-book neatly upon it. "Up in one corner of my yard some one, before I came, allowed some parsnips to escape into the grass, and every year they clog my lawn-mower and mar my sward. It is a splendid herb in its place, but it has no business posing as a lawn plant. 'A weed,' some one has said, 'is a plant growing out of place,' and this one has leaped its bounds, and is not only useless but injurious. No longer are the roots succulent and sweet, but hard and stringy, and, like the tops, rank and poisonous.

"I do not care to re-emphasize the heaping of calamities, by our heedlessness, upon those who may come after us — though I am suffering from some one's former deed; but note this,

that some of our better tendencies may need watching lest they leap their bounds. Anger, industry, learning, love—and zeal of any kind directed the wrong way, unrestrained, unpruned, if you please, may become vices—virtues out of place. Even truth—suppose God should tell the world to-day all He knows of us!

“So, after all, much of the good in us may just consist in position—a position of usefulness at least; and temperance in all things is the true policy till experience shall make the test.

“We wonder often why God permits evil. It is the old question of the ages; but much of what we style evil is just misplaced good. The ‘Jimpson’ that I burn is the stramonium of medicine, the dandelion that I dig is the taraxacum of the druggist, and the dock a spring remedy on every farm. In small doses they may cure; in large ones they kill.

“But why did God give us these tendencies, I know you are asking, if they are to be so restricted? Because in them are the inherent laws of growth for good. They are the forces with which God through nature builds. Exuberance is the outcome of life itself—an incident of existence—an essential of all progress.

By its laws I shape my vine into symmetry and locate my fruit, and I can almost tell you where every blossom will expand. I could not expect my clusters so large, if it were not for this surplus energy which I throw that way.

“The same law of love that lets the weeds grow, sprouts the apple and the wheat, and it is ours to guide and select that which is good for us and our fellows. Out of these man becomes co-creator of his better self—in partnership with God, forming his own character, and moulding to-day, as in Eden, his destiny by choice. But still he may misplace himself, ruin his usefulness, by an overstrained ambition.”

L

CHAPTER XVI

"We talk of deviations from natural life as if artificial life were not also natural." — EMERSON.

"Sometimes we are inclined to class the once-and-a-half-witted with the half-witted because we appreciate only a third part of their wit." — THOREAU.

"To be great we stretch ourselves and stand on tiptoe. But greatness is unstrained and stands on the soles of the feet."

— THOREAU.

"The body sprang . . . and stayed; but the soul — no."

— BROWNING.

As they walked out of the church it dawned on Shan, from the region of his stomach rather than his head, that he had not thought of where they should get their dinners; and the matter became doubly embarrassing as he realized that he had not a cent of money with him.

But Miss Winnie relieved the blank look in his face somewhat, by a bow and smile of recognition at some folks over on a side aisle, who bowed and smiled in return.

"Those are acquaintances of mine, Shan, with whom I travelled one day as I came here. They

have always insisted that I visit them. I dropped them a note the other day. I told them about you, and they expect us to dinner."

But it was with much persuasion that they got him to go at all. He wished her to go, but he would "just knock eround town till time ter go home." He felt that he would rather go hungry than to face, in his awkwardness, "town folks" in their own house. But finally he went.

Mr. and Mrs. Noggins had moved to town a few years before to educate their children, but their oldest boy had neglected school and was now in the curriculum of baseball and the cigarette. He was not at home to-day, because he had to play in a match game at a neighboring watering-place.

The sixteen-year-old daughter was just entering the local college, and colloquially was in the throes of that very, very distinct enunciation in which we all feel that sound compensates so largely for something else. She was having now little spasms of lost breath—at times almost total paralysis of the respiratory centres—between her "ats" and "alls."

The parents represented the average of rural folk of the region, who start out suddenly, late

in life, to run culture down at handicap; and Miss Hudson could not help comparing their bald pretentiousness with the frank sincerity of the people where she taught. Neither could she resist the impression that it were better that, if possible, culture should come to this people midst the naturalness of their surroundings, so that it need not be so strained in its manifestations.

As for Shan, he was so disgusted with the silly girl, in comparing her with the simplicity of Mildred and Dolly, that he felt that if ambition and education meant separation from them and the acquisition of this, he had serious doubts about his high hopes of yesterday. How much our supercilious affectation may cause our humbler brother to stumble!

"Miss Winnie," said the boy, as they rode home, "did you tell Mr. Witmer about me as you told the Nogginses?"

"No. Why, Shan?"

"Because he seemed to preach at me, and I saw him look at you a time er two."

"No, he didn't know we were coming. Did you like the sermon?"

His eyes glowed a moment. "I didn't know

there was such preachin', or could be. He's been a nature-student, too, hasn't he?"

"What do you mean by 'too,' Shan?"

"You know *who* I mean," looking at her. "But, though he helped me much, he's mixt me up. Oughtn't I to have ambition?"

"Oh, yes, ambition to do the best."

"But how erbout greatness?"

"Being best as God sees it, is being greatest, in His eyes at least. The lowly, well-pruned fruit-bearing grape-vine is greatest, after all. That was Mr. Witmer's idea, though he did not bring it out so strongly. He leaves you to preach something to yourself."

A meadow lark flew across the road, alighted on a twig, and sang a half-high keyed, half-low pitched song, with a hoarse raspiness and a liquid gurgle mixed in between, which roused the teacher's interest at once. It was the hybrid song of the eastern and western forms.

They rode on further, noting the early coo of the dove and his extravagancies of flight, whereby he sailed out from a tall perch and back, almost as a sparrow-hawk.

An oriole, they both said, seemed to say so distinctly, "Sweet, sweet, do you hear? do you

hear? sweet?" as though this was a love-song indeed. A flock of geese swept over northward — having learned the benefits of a "flying wedge" to cleave the air with long before some other goose had used it as a means of breaking collar bones.

Then there was the "slee-e-ék" streak of a flock of cowbirds passing, and their habits caused Miss Hudson to speak of parasites and their lesson — old, old things to her and the well-informed, but new to this boy, and interesting because they came to him so directly out of Nature. When she emphasized how a great law of love followed the creature down into its deepest degradation — that the law of suiting everything to its place *was* the great law of love, there came to him for a moment, in view of his high, indefinite, unsatisfied ambition of yesterday, a great thrill of peace. But in a moment his thought seemed to jump at this question: —

"Miss Winnie, why did God make a devil?"

"I think, Shan, that the Devil made himself a devil. Anybody has in himself all the material for a fairly good Satan, and can go into the devil-making business any day."

They drove along awhile in one of those silences that come to those who are all day in each other's company.

In view of the fact that he had been fretting under his fate with Dolly, he expressed some skepticism upon the application of this law of love to man's case — though this morning he was willing to let himself drift with whatever came.

"Yes," she said, in reply to a question. "This law has done so much for man that it has almost made him appear to have fallen upward. The loss of Eden was to man the gain of choice to do either good or evil, and, as a co-worker with God, to build himself by restraint Godward. We should never have known the Model Man if the mere innocence of an ignorant state had not been lost in exchange for the possible sinfulness which came with the knowledge of right and wrong."

She thought the subject settled, and was turning to speak of some roadside thing when she noted a great interest in his face as he said:

"Did man *sin* upward, then, Miss Winnie?"

She gasped an instant at the consequences of her theology.

"No! n-u-h-oh, Shan,—yeh-es. His sin was turned into a blessing. Let's say that he *lost* upward, Mr. Shan,—died upward, if you like. He had been doing that for ages. He was created by loss and death—dying by piecemeal from the beginning. If the scientists be right, he had lost gills to get lungs, lost paws to get hands and upright pose, lost the keenness of the senses and many instincts to get reason, and abandoned reason to some extent, to get faith and spirituality. Likewise he lost that state of innocence—the innocence of the babe and animal—to get moral responsibility, and the means of making the final death a great moult into higher things still. The real Tree of Life was set in the midst of the New Jerusalem, you know. This is the great lesson of this morning's sermon."

"But Christ?" said the boy, his face glowing with the deepest interest.

"Is the Great Sample of what we can be and the great ladder of sacrifice on which we may climb. We have come up by a long line of sacrifices. It is the law of life and progress—no more explainable than why we have to eat to live. Every cry of pain, every mother's wail,

every death-cry, is a shout of triumph in the march of something upward — some one taken, some one left. But man as man could seize nothing earthly that was higher than himself, to pull his spirit up with, so the great biological law of sacrifice reached up to the eternal throne and grasped at God Himself."

They were at home now. She had not intended to preach to this boy. Only the merest interpretation of Mr. Witmer's thought had been in her mind as Shan's questions had spurred her on.

"Miss Winnie," he said, as he left her at the gate, "I'm not goin' ter try ter thank yer fer this day. It's been a year of Sundays inter one with me. I'm er half a lifetime bigger than I wuz. I had never thought — I had never thought. I didn't know I could think such thoughts. Good-by!"

And now, in the fervor of his feelings, his love reached out and took Dolly again into its shrine ; and the petty ambitions of yesterday — petty only in their purpose — gave way to a broad enthusiasm of hope that she should be his yet, because he was worthy of her, or could make himself so, in his soul of souls. The high impulse came,

with the trickling tears on his face and in the softness of his feelings, that she should love him, not because he was great, but because he was good. What a pity many of us do not die in these moods !

CHAPTER XVII

"If we were earthworms, liable at every instant to be cut in two by the spade, perhaps too much sensation might not be good for us." — RUSKIN.

"Cruel — partly through want of imagination." — RUSKIN.

"Dreams . . . when monarch Reason sleeps, this mimic wakes." — DRYDEN.

IT is easy to see how Harvest Homes, Yuletides, Thanksgivings, and the various customs of rejoicing after a finished work at certain seasons originated. They are as old as the Sabbath itself, and, like it, founded in the very necessity of things.

Now that the corn was all planted, here well down into the month of May, Shan thought of his usual custom of taking a fish or a squirrel-hunt, as a sort of punctuation point between the planting of the last corn and the ploughing of the first — the latter now just peeping up. There were yet in his region then a good many gray squirrels, and they were "about ripe" out upon the elm limbs of the bottoms; for our timber had not been so cut out then as now.

The young fox squirrels had been out for some time. In March he had shot at a red-tailed hawk carrying something over, and she had dropped the hind legs of a half-grown northern fox squirrel, which she was carrying to her nestlings, having taken the fore-parts for herself.

But yielding to the mood of rest and reflection that he was in, he decided upon a fish; for his style of fishing required small exertion. Getting the grubbing-hoe he began a search for earthworms along the garden fence.

"Funny things is fishin' worms," he mused, after he had dug up a great stretch of earth. "Never around when you want 'em. Other day when I was ploughin' hereby, they squirmed anywhere. Now I can't see uh one. The last hard rain, one climbed into the tin cup on the pump—er else he was rained in there. Wonder which? Don't believe in its rainin' fish-worms much. It don't stand ter reason. He's always deep in the ground before a storm comes—soz a whirlwind can't get holt er him to suck him up. Saw one climbin' a winder-pane onct, and that settled it with me. If he can get things wet enough, he can clim' any-

where. He comes up on the surface when it rains. Seems ter like er bath. Don't know why he should—dirt don't seem to stick to him. He just sweats it off—or greases it off, I reckon's better. He seems oiled by er kinder slime that makes him slip through the dirt slick. Wonderful stretchy thing's er fish-worm. Yer think yuh get a whopper here, but out on the creek yer find him nothin' but er string uh skin 'bout a foot long. Funny things."

He finally found some in a damp place under some rubbish, put them in a tin can, sprinkled some moist soil over them to keep them fresh, and was ready. He still had some scruples about losing a whole afternoon at so busy a season, and remembering a partial break in the barbed-wire fence around the "timbuh fawty," as his father always called it, he put a pair of cutting pliers in his pocket, with which to mend it as he passed. He also took a paper sack full of salt, portions of which he dropped here and there in snowy piles at the roots of trees, where he knew the stock would find it.

Having emptied his sack and fixed the breach in the fence, he felt more as though he had earned respite from toil than if he had come

directly on; so he hurried up, and struck the creek at a bend, where the whirl of the water had worn out a great hole known as "big deep"—a favorite swimming-place.

Here he had expected to find some neighbor boys, but he was disappointed; and, alone, he doffed the two simple but essential garments that he wore, and took his first creek-bath, for the season, at a plunge. But there was no fun in diving, or floating and showing off, when there was no one to outdo, so he rubbed the blue saponaceous mud of the bank all over him till he looked like a Digger Indian, washed it off, and put on his clothes.

"Dog won't eat dog," he muttered, as he used this substitute for soap, "but dirt eats dirt sometimes."

He went further down to a drift, against which a dull milky scum floated, under which he knew large mud-cats like to live and feed. He took out a bunch of worms, pierced them again and again in loops, leaving their squirming tips here and there to attract the attention of the fish, spat upon the mass with great seriousness, and threw it with quite a "chug" into the bluish slime. He had cut his pole near by

— a long trim pawpaw bush — and had peeled it — all except near the end where he would hold it. He did not use a cork. He "loved ter feel the fish pull," he said.

He brought up a crawfish, shortly, which hung a moment to his bait and dropped back. Soon it came up again, and before it dropped, a gentle movement had placed it over the bank, where it fell and began with its tail a backward flipping movement toward the creek. But the boy caught it, and, with a sort of savage zest, pulled off the fleshy part behind the thorax for bait, and threw the struggling, pinching fore-part down.

Anon he felt a deep, strong, awkward jerk at his pole, and his line began to describe lazily a rude circle in the slime. Then there was a slow, steady, but confident movement for cover under the drift, whereupon Shan jerked. It seemed at first as if he had struck a log. There was no skill — just a straight pull between the struggling fish and straining tackle. In a few seconds a cat about fifteen inches long lay on the bank, began turning somersaults down the slope toward the water, and, loosed from the hook, threatened to escape. The boy

leaped in ahead of his prize and tried to fall down upon it, here and there, till he finally secured it, not, however, till one of the spines had run far into his hand.

He was not a beauty anyway, dressed as he was to-day, but smeared from hip to heel with the slick creek-bank mud, his appearance now was doubly ludicrous. He kicked his legs out a little and resumed his fishing, but other cats were not inclined to bite after so much racket. As he rose to go on, he put his hand behind him, and jumped and yelled a little, as the poor tailless "craw" closed on his finger with one of its nippers. He tore the body loose from the leg, but still the latter clung and pinched for a moment.

Free finally, he went further down. Here he snatched out a sunfish, there a chub, and further on a little school of "croppy" bit, one after the other, till many, perhaps all, were taken. Shan called them "pee-yearch." Lower still, he saw on the other side, under and near a great stump that leaned out over a deep pool, a sudden swell of the water which he knew was made by a large black bass as he darted at the passing minnows. He had seen some folk from town

come out one day and fish with live minnows for bait; and though he could have made a net of a gunny sack and caught this bait, there was something revolting to him in sacrificing a fish unto a fish, and impaling one alive upon a hook for hours.

He stopped opposite the stump, and tying a dead twig in his line for a float, threw his bunch of worms out that way. His movement made a little greenish frog screech and chuck itself into the creek, and other spotted ones were leaping in the weeds, reminding Shan of snakes. Further down the bull-frog twanged a loose, low string on his bass-viol, and as the boy seated himself and became quiet, a water thrush alighted, bowed and minced his prancing step in a mud flat near, and a muskrat floated past him with his raft of hay—a little shock of green grass which he had newly cut from the shallow bank above—and he dived with it beneath the sprangle of some birch roots further down.

Up-stream, shortly, came in graceful undulations the harmless little water snake of our region, bearing in his mouth a little mud-cat, which was struggling yet. Over the stream zigzagged the dragon-fly or "snake doctor," as

if waiting for a case of indigestion, when the snake should swallow his spiny prey.

Just under him, some little black bugs, or beetles, short and dumpy, were swimming round and round, in intertwining circles, as if all their limbs were off on one side; and some "skeeters" (skaters), as Shan called them, were sliding up, by jerks upon their toetips merely, to investigate his line. Leaning back, he stretched himself up the slope and stuck his pole between his knees. As he gazed up, there were the mazy love dances of the gnats in circling clusters, the dragon-flies whirring through and through them in deadly darts. With the drowsy hum of insects' wings in the trees, the rustle of the soft foliage to the barely stirring breeze, and all the sounds of a springtime woodland droning in his ears, he fell asleep.

His slumber was not the oblivion that comes at night, but that semi-conscious lostness that is burdened with an idea of drowsy purpose. His mind was trying to do something, but was dimly aware of its failure; and there was a consciousness of gnats about the nose and beetles about his neck. He roused slightly, to rub the "sweat-fly" from his lips, where its tickle

lingered so persistingly ; and once, when in his movements he had pressed the sweat-bee on his hand, its little sting awoke him.

Just then something disturbed his cork, he saw, and he pulled the bait to the surface. A little fish followed it up and flipped his tail, with a great splash, as he dived back. The boy noted that the hook needed rebaiting — the worms being washed out and frayed ; but he simply muttered, "chubs," and falling back, drew his chip hat well over his face, drowsed again into the land of uncertain fancies.

There were floating, dissolving fragments of stretches of tilled soil with planter stripes in circles, and mules with mould-boards on them, and ploughs with legs, turning Henry Simpson up with a snout upon him like a mole. The runners of the planter, winding like a snake, were cutting Sol Jenkins into bits. There was Miss Winnie hanging by a petiole, as a leaf, and here was Dolly, nodding as a flower on the sward. Up in a tree was little Sam, who was scampering in the branches with a squirrel's tail over his back, and an owl's ears and face upon his head ; and Shan was trying to shoot him, but the shot merely rolled harmlessly out of the gun-barrel,

while Mildred fanned him with her wings and swept a grass straw across his ticklish nose.

Suddenly he found himself almost rolled over by a strong jerk at his pole, and jumping up, saw his rod running toward the creek, as if it had belonged to Moses.

He grabbed it just as it floated off. "Turkle, I reckon," he thought, and he raised the paw-paw switch, when whiz-z-z the string whistled, and a great, greenish-silvery flash made the water boil at the up-stream limit of the line. Back again down-stream the great something swished again, and almost in the tangle of the old stump's roots the green flash reappeared, and the drowsy, dizzy boy almost tumbled into the creek at the pull. Round and round the fish went, till the boy was fully awake. At last he began to pull the tired fish in, but at a sudden spurt the pole broke, and the tip went floating off.

Shan paused a moment, held his breath, and with a leap threw himself sprawling upon the water, grabbing at the piece of pole and nearly knocking the breath and senses out of himself with the shock. When he rose up, the water was only about waist deep where he stood, and

he soon realized that his line would not long resist the fish without the spring of the pole's tip. But once, in its rounds, when the fish went near the bank, and grounded in the shallow edge, the boy threw himself upon it, held it in his arms, and despite its slippery struggles, walked ashore with it as if it were a babe.

"Well, I'll be dinged," he said. "How'd I ketch that bass, yer reckon? About eighteen inches long! Te whew! won't mother's eyes dance when she sees that — and father! well, I guess he won't brag so much now about the big fish in Kentucky. How'd er bass come to bite at frayed-out worms, yer reckon? My hook's a thunderin' way down in him. Have ter cut a forked stick ter git it out."

Having procured this, he ran its short prongs along the line far down into the stomach of the big-mouthed bass. After a few prods the line began to come up, and to the boy's surprise he found at its end, hooked in the lip, a little four-inch chub.

"Huh!" he said, "I've been fishin' with live bait in spite of myself. Ain't er heap er things accerdents!"

He strung the great fish upon his string,

which had a piece of umbrella rib upon its end, as a needle; and he put them in the water to feel them pull. He was done fishing for this day. Could he ever bob for mud-cats again? He would go to town soon and buy him proper tackle for catching bass.

"Golly! there's higher things in fishin', too," he said. "I guess there's higher things in everything."

CHAPTER XVIII

“Has a frog a soul; if so, how many?” — HUXLEY.

“When beauty fires the blood, how love exalts the mind.”
— DRYDEN.

“As the mind is pitched, the ear is pleased.” — COWPER.

“I left the woods for as good reasons as I went there. I had
several more lives to live.” — THOREAU.

IN some way Shan felt that he was not ready to go home yet. He thought he would tie his fish to a root and walk around — bird-nesting, maybe. As he stooped he glanced down-stream, and there was the bull-frog still “chunging” a sort of musical exhaust, as if he were an engine. Shan saw that he was on a root under an over-hanging bank, and slipping up he dropped his hook, holding by the line merely, in front of the frog’s nose. It seemed to hump itself a little and the hook flew far out of its swinging arc and caught among some grasses. Again the hook swung, and again and again it flew away as the frog humped himself, till in a flash the creature was swinging with sprawling reaches, out over the water.

Shan hauled him up, but was in a predicament.

"Can't bear a frog.. Always afraid of warts. Cold and clammy, anyway. How'm I goin' ter get that hook? That's a boss hook, I tell yer. Can't afford ter give it up." He was thinking of his bass.

In the mean time the frog was pulling, with his hands, in a very human way, at the string in his mouth.

"Whopper, ain't you?" said Shan. "They say your legs is good. Believe I'll try 'em, if I can get mother ter cook 'em."

And he took out his knife. "Seen fellers just take off the hind legs and leave the fore-parts livin'. That's cruel. But I did that with ther crawfish. Funny how a feller's good in some things and bad in others. Why ain't he got his conscience with him all ther time? Seems ter be his raisin' — his environment, as Miss Winnie would call it. Think of them worms, too, — I can put them on er hook squirmin', but my conscience stops at givin' er fish ter a fish. Seems too much like goin' partners with ther cannerbals."

He drew the frog up to him. Its hands were

wonderfully active. It almost seemed to pray as it pulled.

"By George! if you wuz loose, I'd let you go," he said, as much in pity as disgust. He put a stick on the frog and pulled a little at the line, when a long fleshy something came out. "Lord, I'll *have* ter kill yer now, I've pulled all your insides out," he said.

He cut the head off and held it up by the line, hooked to the fleshy thing.

"By George! that's his tongue. Dogged if I knowed er frog tied his tongue in front and then swallowed ther other end. That's what he kept flippin' at ther hook. He just rams things down his throat with it—kinder loadin' himself like er gun."

He looked at the body of the frog, and instead of dying, as the boy thought any decent thing should, its hands were still pulling at an imaginary string in an imaginary mouth.

"Why, ther fool don't know he's dead," the boy blurted; and as he sat astonished, a blue-bottle fly buzzed around and alighting on the frog's side, the hind leg seemed to lift itself and knock the insect off. It alighted on the other side and was kicked off by the other hind foot,

and once, when it perched further forward, a fore leg swept it off and then resumed its pulling at the imaginary string.

"Seems ter know er lot er things 'thout his head," mused the boy. "Got heads in his legs, I reckon — like that old crawfish, who seemed ter have one in his pincher which told him ter pinch me after I pulled it off."

He now cut off its hind legs at the loins, and left the headless and hipless trunk sitting up serene, its hands now supporting it in a natural position. He was stooping for some further experiment, when some terrible screams came to him from he hardly knew where. He sprang to his feet, listened this way and that, and started on a run around the bend below him. Only a few yards enabled him to see a confusion of sunbonnets, straw hats, and flaunting things in general across the creek a little further down, and under a steep bank he noted in particular that a female form was standing, about waist deep in the water, with her floating skirts, inflated like a balloon, gently settling around her.

Instantly he jumped in, and swam and floundered across to her, and in a few seconds he was pushing from below, in a rather uncere-

monious and undignified way, Mildred Watkins' bedraggled form up into some friendly hands stretched down from above to meet her. Then he began to climb out himself, grabbing at roots and growing shrubs, when he found his own hands grasped by Mildred's clammy one and another that was not so, and he was dragged, dripping wet, up over the crumbling bank that had given away under the girl.

His first efforts were to quiet the screeches of little Sam, who was sure that "Thister" was drowning yet, though she stood, screaming with laughter, before him. Then Shan glanced at the sunbonnet that was above the other hand that had helped him out, and realized for the first time that Dolly Simpson's face was in it.

He started as if she had struck him, when he saw the pained countenance and her under lip set between her teeth. In one hand she clasped a finger of the other, in the ball of which a fishhook was buried beyond the barb. In an instant he had her hand in his, and had bitten off the line — an act which Mildred misinterpreted for a moment.

"Oh, I know how it hurts," he said tenderly; "but it will have to hurt worse to get it out. It

is miles to the doctor's, and you would have to suffer till he comes. I can take it out for you. Will you let me?" (Eagerly.) "But I hate to hurt you so much." And a sort of hope seemed to fall in his voice.

The novels were all wrong, he thought. Why didn't he know that hand when it grasped his in good-will over the bank? and why now, only since he knew whose it was, as it lay trembling with pain in his own, should he feel himself so thrilled?

The girl rapidly nodded her assent, still holding in her lip.

"Mildred, will you help me hold her hand?" he asked.

"Well, yes, Shan, of course; but I never thought of you needin' help in a thing like that."

And though the tears flowed, Dolly blushed a rebuke at her friend, and shot out her blue bitten lip, as if to say: "You think you're awful smart." But Shan looked down and suffered.

While Mildred bore the little hand hard down upon his knee, he took out his cutting pliers from his pocket, and asked Dolly to look another way. But she only bit her lip the harder and smiled to him with her eyes, from which tear

after tear was running. Steeling himself, he snipped the bent loop off from the hook, where the line was tied, and taking the remaining part in his strong fingers, he thrust the curving point in deeper, then up and outward to the surface again, and, with the pliers, drew out the shank as if it were a needle in a piece of cloth.

Dolly had determined not to scream or faint in the face of this hero of her heart. If it had been her father, or Henry, or the doctor even, she would have been the same spoiled, petted Dolly that she was: but humanity does not always do its best in the family circle, and often gives to strangers glimpses of jewels that never sparkle in the home light. She just silently plumped her finger into her mouth.

"Shan," said Mildred, "we won't ask you to see us home or wait for us; for you and I both need some other clothes, and Dolly needs some turpentine on her finger. You know how thankful I am for your help, and Dolly — why, she can speak for herself — if her finger'll let her."

"She got her hurt in helping me," said Shan. "It's me who should be thankful — and — and — I am."

"What should I er done without your

skill?" said Dolly, spitting out her finger and its blood. "Why, I owe you a doctor's bill. Wasn't I helping Mildred help her friend and helper? What we'd uh done without you, I'd like to know? I don't know how to thank you, only —"

"By thest lovin' him, Dolly, ath I do," said little Sam, running in and grabbing Shan around one of his big wet legs, and lifting his own little bare feet from the ground as, in his gratitude, he clenched his teeth and hugged.

"Thay, Thee-an," still hanging on and looking up, "I think they both lovth you, cauth they both wath awful thekee-ard the time yer tored yore Thunday panth."

When Shan got loose from him, Dolly had turned away, her burning face safe in the depths of that sunbonnet, but Mildred was mischievously smiling her sweet good-will; and she winked the queerest little flash at him he had ever seen.

He started back up the creek, and when he reached a "riffle," he waded across, went to his fish, slung them over his shoulder, and started home.

The chat might scold him as he passed and blow his whistle-in-the-bottle sort of call at him

from the thicket's depth ; but "that fool squawking bird didn't know " all he knew. The catbird might give his whining caterwaul from the smilax tangle, but it was music now. The boy was sorry for him in his distress. No longer did the pert whistling " quir-r-r-k " of the crested fly-catcher seem obtrusive or provoke an answering contempt; for he felt now that the woods were his to give and the birds might have them. He sat down upon a log and listened as the great shadows lengthened and all was shade.

A pair of flickers were making fools of themselves away up in the trees, where the sun shone yet. He knew they were being silly by their " Whickups! whickups! whickups!" but he did not blame the birds. He was making a fool of himself a little when he pursed his lip about that bleeding finger, and the movement into the mouth had saved him.

" 'Twould never uh done ! My ! my ! what little things do stand between er feller and his fate ! "

A Maryland yellow-throat, somewhere in the trees, said " Sweetity, sweetity, sweetity sweet," and his mate, in the " buck bushes " near by shook her wings helplessly and fell from branch

to branch in her appeal to the boy not to take her young, but herself instead, if he could. But they were in no danger now. Further off over the tree tops came the wild shrill screams of the indigo-bird rejoicing that so much of life was love and he was in it. A robin of the deep woods "twiler-ipped" with such a strange free wildness that Shan scarcely knew his song—it was so clear, joyous and piercing; and a brown thrasher lifted his medley in tones purer and far better phrased than any his prairie fellows ever knew. Far away a group of rose-breasted grosbeaks, ceasing war, were wooing their respective mates in turns of emulatory warbles—the truce of love returned.

In the spirit of the birds, Shan felt that if the deep woodsy earth had made him over into a savage again when he first came out and threw himself upon its breast, it was making him into something more than a civilian now. Life had become an ecstasy, and as the wood-peewee sang his soft sad "Psee-oo-wee" in plaintive sibilance, as if his soul were whistling out between his teeth, the boy almost felt his own spirit arise above his sordid body on the log and float.

Then, when his mood deepened with the shad-

ows, there came from somewhere in the cool damp bottom behind him a low tinkling trill, a liquid gurgle, like a brook, a soft flute-like run, slow, clear, deliberate — the very voice of evening and of peace — of love and all things satisfied.

Oh, fruition realized! Oh, haven reached! Oh, gratitude-flooded soul! No need to fret, for happiness was brooding over the earth; no need for worry or the waste of tears, for the past was dead; no need to rush or even move, for the future was secure in the eternal present!

Shan had heard what he had called the "Stingaree bird" before — just heard it when he went fishing in the spring, or listened late for the cowbell in the woods; but then it was only a sound — at best, an association. But now, all softened with his sympathy and tender state, the wood-thrush melody crept into him as a part of self — a soul-step to another realm — a means and medium of his spirit's flight. With it he hoped, aspired, and loved. He drank it till it filled him with an intoxicating gratitude that Nature had given him her benediction, and had breathed into him the breath of a new life, and he was in her image — for she and he were one.

Finally he arose, as one that has slept, walked shamblingly along, stooped under the barbed-wire fence, and drove the milk cows out from the browsing herd, through the winding paths. When the old gate had creaked to let them into the lot, he listened back again, and whence he had come he could hear nothing now but the whip-poor-will's distressing wail as if in hopeless love.

He straightened the languid kinks out of himself, and pitied the bird, at the thought of his own more fortunate condition.

"You're late, Shan," his mother said. But he held high the great greenish shiny fish, and smiled and kissed her on the face, with his own chin just a bit a-quiver. What noble boy in love has not turned with a tenderer heart toward his mother?

"That boy's not well," she said later, as he arose from the table with his supper scarcely touched.

"Oh, 'snuthin but a little flurry about ketchin' thuh big fish," said the father. But the matter cost Shan several gags that night over a large dose of dock and dandelion bitters, before he went to bed.

As he lay tossing, the thing that worried him was why little Sam had said "they both"; but he recalled Mildred's wink and went to sleep, muttering, "Dinged if er heap er things ain't accerdents."

CHAPTER XIX

"If we stay at home and mind our own business, who will want railroads?" — THOREAU.

WHEN the great Chicago and Denver railroad determined to make a nearly straight line between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, it was quite uncertain for a while just what portion of northeastern Missouri it would cross. Even after the general route was selected and Shan's county town was one of the points, it was not yet known what farms it would cut in its western exit.

Many preliminary lines had been run here and there, miles apart, as the engineer had felt for the best grades and cheapest construction; and ranges of stakes, with cabalistic red figures of +-marks and decimals, could be seen all over the prairies southwest of town. Visions of unsymmetrical farms, cut bias by a track, and of gateway crossings and cattle-gaps; of "feedin'" steers "skee-yard" out of their fatness by the "kee-yars" as they passed; of burning pastures

and haystacks and even standing cornfields in the autumn drouths ; of tongues broken out of upturned wagons, at the engine's puff ; of even death and tears and the worst to pay, to phrase it mildly, had floated some here, some there, till the neighborhood was in a ferment.

Some were delighted at the prospect of a railroad "on our land," and had visions of added wealth at the added value to the farm, per acre.

As the surveying party came and went and came again in its mysterious way, the farmers followed it about, scheming for depots or cattle-pens at certain places, or asking for a "shyin' of the line a little furder off," so as to miss their fields.

The transitman, who led the van, grew tired of these importunities, and, because no favors at all were his to give, he promised in a spirit of fun all sorts of things to those that asked. As the chief had sent him back and forth in this Brushy Fork region, he had met nearly every farmer in it, and made him glad or sad with his promises or forebodings.

The high ridge between Brushy Fork and Coon Creek lay directly across the general route, and, though by no means insurmountable,

it rose abruptly near the crest, and, on a straight line, was something of a terror to the engineer with the engine of that period. Hence the preliminary lines galore and the great amount of cheek-by-jowlness among the neighbors.

At a school meeting two friends had come to blows, and their relations had taken it up, because two depots could not stand upon "jinin' forties."

"Somebody's lied," one said, "and I don't think it's the engineer, nuther" (meaning the transitman).

"Maybe yer think it's me," the other replied, with a sort of "jibberjawed" set in his face, to use a local word.

"If ther shoe—"

But he never said "fits"—just seemed to have a few brought on by a smacking blow—whereupon the "meetin' broke," and the row became general.

When the epidemic of "nose-bleed" and blackened eyes had subsided and the school-house pump was brought into requisition, the men began to compare notes, and there were to be depots on about every alternate quarter section from there to the county seat, with

town sites thrown in as strictly confidential. Thus the feeling against the railroad now was far from friendly.

At last it was rumored that a new survey was being made further north than any yet, and that this was the final location, as every other one had been styled, of course. Arthur Linton, the field-chief, was along now with the party, and late one afternoon had loitered behind to study the profiles of the approaches which the various lines had made to this bothersome ridge. He had pointed out to his transitman what appeared, at a mere topographical glance, as the best direction, and had sent him on — the levelman and the others following closely. He would be on shortly, he had said, and overtake them before they reached the crest.

He had figured half an hour, perhaps, when, walking over a gentle slope, he found the whole party, transitman, leveller, rodman, tapemen, and axemen — all bunched, like a flock of sheep, at the crossing of a lane near a farm-house.

“ Guess Hopkins has sprung his transit again. Why doesn't he use a ‘Gurley’? ” he murmured.

An engineer will contend for the merits of his favorite instrument as a woman will for her

brand of sewing-machine, or a farmer for his "make" of mower.

But there was nothing the matter with Hopkins' "Buff and Bergher." The obstruction was sitting on the rider of the rail fence, on the farther side of the road, with his heels in the cracks below, and across his knees was laid an old army musket, the hammer of which stood up away back from the tube, like a rearing equestrian statue of some hero.

"Hello, Hopkins," said Linton, approaching, "what's the matter?" not glancing at the percher.

"I'm ther matter," said the figure, throwing one suspender a little nearer the neck. "You-all ain't comin' in here," nodding back behind him.

"Why, good-evening," said the field-chief, drawing still nearer. "I beg pardon. What's the objection?"

"I'm ther objection, too," the farmer replied. "Me 'an this," lifting the gun a little.

Linton could see the bright new musket cap, like a plug hat, shining ominously on the stout tube, as if it were freshly put on. The old man was evidently loaded for the occasion.

"Why, I'm sorry about this, Mr.—Mr.—er ah—I beg pardon, I believe I do not know your name."

"My name's Simpson, but that's nothin' ter do with it. Case is ther same, if my name wuz Brown."

"Mr. Simpson, yes—" resumed the chief.
"My name is Linton. This—"

"That's got nothin' ter do with't either. Same as if yourn wuz Jones. If you-all is goin' west ter grow up with ther country, you'd better go round ther big road. Longest way's best sometimes. This un here through my sheep pasture ain't healthy. Nearly all ther dogs that go that uh way dies uh lead pizin."

Linton flushed a little, but kept cool.

"But let's talk about this, Mr.—uh—Simpson— This is my transitman, Mr. Hopkins. He sets the stakes and makes the bends, you know," he quickly added, as he saw that Hopkins' calling was not understood.

"Yer don't look like the boss liar that driv all them stakes out south of here and located all them dee-poze," he said, as Hopkins approached the fence.

"No, that was another man," said Linton,

trying to laugh. "I had to dismiss him. He was too promising. Now, about this matter! Let us talk."

"I did talk."

"Well, yes, but I want to talk a little — "

"Spit it out, then. Make her short, it's nearly milkin' time. Wanter thank me fer showin' yer ther best way?"

"Well, not just that," said Linton, smiling. "What are your reasons for not wanting us to enter your pasture?"

"Got no use fer yer — kin drive my own pegs, and don't want no dee-poze ur town sites."

"But the road may never go there — may run on some south survey yet. It — "

"Ain't er goin' ter git ter try."

"Now listen a moment," said the engineer.

"Oh, I kin listen. Kin hear too. Kin hear er sheep run er half er mile erway at night."

"Well, what I have to say is simply this," said Linton, firmly, "I should like to enter your place peaceably."

"Find it ther peacerblest place in all creation, if yer *do* enter. See that yaller dog under ther post-oak thar. Looks peacerble, don't he?"

"I say," resumed Linton, his eyes closed just

a little, "I should like to enter this place peaceably, as I have entered others, but if I cannot go in thus, I'm going in any way."

The farmer looked at the chief's boots, then up at his corduroy pants, next at his woollen overshirt, and by the time he got to his face, Linton was going on:—

"The law gives us the right to make our surveys quietly wherever our judgment may deem best. I can go back to town and get the sheriff's help and enter. But I do not want to do that. I have not time. Our company is going to pay for all damages and —"

"And throw in some stock-pens ter boot?"

"No, we simply pay your damages. I want to know at once the grade from here to that ridge behind your house. Now look here, Mr. Simpson —"

"I don't see much."

"You'll not make anything out of this. There are eight or nine of us, every one armed in some way. You may get one of us — me, for I'm going to start first; but some one behind me will get you sure. Now what is the use of this. Our mission is peaceable and lawful. If the road should pass through that ridge there, a

deep cut at least — perhaps a tunnel — will have to be made, and you can sell the contractors supplies at good prices. Then your damages will be heavy, and these two will make quite a sum."

There was something in the steely gray eye of this young man that held the attention of the farmer, now that it had got that far up — something businesslike, purposeful, and determined. He glanced at Hopkins, also, behind his chief, and saw a firm look in his face and a leathery zone above his hips that ran ominously backward under his coat. The flagman had his steel-shod implement with its sharp point at "present arms," and the axemen's tools were held by both their hands. All these had come a little closer up. The tapemen, however, were edging away, one behind the other, while the rodman moving off suddenly recalled that he had not given the last reading to the levelman, who, far back on the slope, had drawn the old man up to him with his powerful telescope, which seemed to the farmer a very formidable weapon, with its artillery-like appearance and position. It was a time to consider.

"Now," said Linton, firmly, "I'm going over."

"No! by thunder, yer don't!" said the farmer, leaping almost into the muzzle of Hopkins' pistol, "till yer go hom' 'ith me and get yer supper! 'Swhat I come out here fur!"

And Linton never knew—just absolutely knew—to his dying day the real motives in the matter.

So they all walked home with Mr. Simpson to as fine a supper and as warm a welcome as they had yet received along the route. By noon next day the boys had run the line to the crest of the divide, and when they came in for dinner, Linton, Hopkins, and Yake, the levelman, looked over their notes and struck a rough profile sheet; and when the chief laid his rule upon it, it was evident at a glance that the great transcontinental thoroughfare would cut its way to Coon Creek through the crest of the deeply wooded ridge behind the Simpson sheep-lot.

CHAPTER XX

“The soul’s Rialto hath its merchandises;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart.”

— E. B. BROWNING.

“Flowers betray where precious wealth lies buried; not of gold, but love.” — PARK BENJAMIN.

THESE were “flusterin’” times to Dolly, as her mother styled it — not that so many guests were confusing, for they had had more threshers to stay all night than there were men in the engineering crowd. But she had never come so close to two such cultivated men as Linton and Hopkins. While the younger was the handsomer, the added years of the chief sat lightly on him in appearance, and flashed out strongly in easy manners, in information and good-natured repartee, and the general thoughtful courtesies of experience. Dolly could scarcely have said which one she liked the better. In the one case, youth called unto youth in the simple sympathy of the lack of years, experience, and knowledge; in the other case,

soul reached unto soul in the thirst of knowing and the pleasure of imparting.

The party was a day or two yet in getting just the right grade and best "tangent" up the ridge, and two more nights were passed at the Simpsons' before the stakes told them, in plain figures, that it was poor economy to return at night to even such hospitable shelter. As, on the third morning, they shook hands all round, Dolly felt very sad at the parting. A new light had shone, and she had feared that she should never see its like again.

But here now, some weeks later, when she got home from her fishing, who should come out to meet her, with his old free, easy grace, but Arthur Linton, followed by the grinning Yake and his blushing rodman. And though the chief hurt her sore finger in his cordial grasp, she smiled at him warmly, and asked about Mr. Hopkins. Linton said the young man had a better job out west and would not be with him any more. And Dolly had a little funeral in her heart right there, though she never knew just what it was she buried.

They had come back to set slope stakes, Linton said, and they would be around some

days; at which Dolly smiled again, and went in.

Next day Yake and the rodman went "slope-staking" up the ridge, while the chief examined the region somewhat geologically, to determine, if possible, whether a deep cut or a tunnel through the ridge would be more economical. In search for this he strolled along the creek, chipped at a limestone ledge here, a shaly outcropping of slate there, or dug a little into a drift of flints and gravels further on. The indications seemed thus far rather favorable for a cut—no heavy ledges of rock above the grade being evident. The next morning he visited a quarry near, and found the stone soft, thin, in separate layers, easily taken out; but while this would make culverts and bridge piers, perhaps, he doubted its quality and quantity for lining a tunnel.

At dinner he heard from Mr. Simpson that there was an abandoned coal shaft up the creek, and he felt that by seeing what had been thrown out of this he could form a better idea still.

So, after the meal, he got proper directions about turning up a little "draw" beyond a

"riffle and ur water-gap" and "the third new-cut field erbove," and he strolled off, pulling at every flower that he passed.

He was an amateur botanist, and carried a flora which he had cut out of a popular work and had had bound in flexible leather, as his Hencke and his Trautwine.

Besides his simple love for plants, he was a crank upon the cross-fertilization of flowers and their curious structure for its accomplishment by means of winds and insects. It was what the commercial drummer would have called his "side line," while engineering was his business.

But here there was the new interest of a partially new field. Back east, where he was educated and had worked much, and down south, where was his home, he knew all the commoner flowers of the season, but here, new varieties, at least, of some familiar friends appeared, and frequently new species altogether.

At last he came to the "draw," and following it up soon found himself upon the dump of the old coal mine. There was nothing to be seen but slate and half-rotten shales—no signs that any strata of stone had been penetrated. He wondered what was at the bottom under

this deposit. He peeped out cautiously over the shaft—dropped a stone—heard no water—reached back to a shrub near by—leaned far out and looked into its depths. There was to be seen nothing but dried leaves at the bottom, and an old ladder just reaching to the top. This last had been made by splitting a long sapling at the lower end and leaving the top entire—the whole having stout pins running horizontally through auger-holes to form the rungs. He took hold of its top and shook it. The white lichens shone far down it in the faint light, and the bark in some places loosed and fell to the bottom; but the pole seemed to feel fairly stiff to his jerk.

Yes, he would like to see the bottom of that hole. Perhaps it rested on a ledge. He struck a match, lighted a leaf torn from his note-book, and dropped it down. It burnt all the way of its fall—even blazing on the bottom. There was no gas, then. He shook the pole again and swung himself out upon its upper rungs.

CHAPTER XXI

"God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures shows two soul-sides." — BROWNING.

"The inward eye which is the bliss of solitude."

— WORDSWORTH.

" . . . the cry
Which made me look a thousand ways
In bush and tree and sky."

— WORDSWORTH.

THE disk cultivator had not made its appearance upon our Missouri farms yet; though, since we had for half a century been tearing up our roads with narrow-tired, dish-shaped wheels, it seems strange that even some ordinary genius had not discovered that something a little smaller and thinner was a good thing with which to tear up our fields.

But the double cultivator, tongued and tongueless, riding and riderless, was abroad in the land; and larger acreage of corn was being planted year by year as the implements became better.

The early corn could now "stand a stirrin'," the father had said, and Shan went out the second day after the fishing to begin its cultivation. If

he had ploughed mechanically when he broke the ground, his work was almost doubly so now. After he got the thing adjusted and "caught the hang of it," to use his phrase, he could follow the walking cultivator, guide the team with the lines, kick the clods off the hills, and sway, lift, and bear down upon the hinged double ploughs, one in each hand, till his left scarcely knew what his right was doing.

At last this merely mechanical bent of his frame seemed to impress him, and musing, he began to mutter:—

"Wonder if a feller ain't sorter double — jest like his cultivators — not only in his hands and feet and things, but got two souls or sumpthin'?"

He ploughed a little further and began to whistle. "Uh feller's heart goes on 'thout his head havin' anything ter say — mine does in more ways than beatin'. In that way my head goes on 'thout my heart sometimes. Heart says, 'Go over'n have it out with Dolly!' Head says, 'No, er if yer do go — go slow.' Two of me that way, sure."

He stopped, rolled a clod off a hill, took his handkerchief out of his hat, wiped his face and put it back. Then he stooped a little, put the

toe of one foot under the hollow of the knee-joint of the other leg, held hard the heel in his hand, and, with his tongue between his teeth, drew off a dirt-hardened plough-boot, with sundry holes in it, and began beating it upon the plough-stock. When the caked dirt was loosened from the inner sole, he held the boot high to pour the contents out, as if he thought they were something that ought to foam and "bear a bead."

"Dinged if I ain't erbout planted in my boots. Miss Winnie says she's an evo—ev—evolutionist; says she don't berlieve man's made right out er plain dirt, but of sumpthin' else that got its dirt away back. I'm mighty close ter mine ter-day. A little extrer shine and shower, as Mr. Witmer'd say, and I'd sprout. 'Sfunny how I feel ter-day. I haven't sense enough to be unhappy. I'm another feller. I'm in the Garden of Eden before the fall, I reckon."

He mused awhile. His mind seemed to make a long run.

"Fer what I can learn and love — fer lifting myself above ther animals, how I love Miss Winnie. What er thing 'twould be ter go through life with such er mind as that! Fer sociability and feller-feelin', fer all ther

love-*yer*-neighbor-as-*yerself* sort of good-will,
I love Mildred Watkins. Lord, how close er
man's *soul* could live ter hers!"

He turned and gripped his ploughs.

"But fer eyes to look into and have look into
yours, fer a cheek ter lay yer own against and er
chin ter dimple at yer, fer the rib of a feller's
ribs —"

He mused a few minutes again.

"Why, either of them other girls could love
another feller and 'twould be all right, but if
Dolly *did*, I'd —" and he started his team with
a "Git up there," through his clenched teeth,
and he struck the willing mules a needless blow.

"Strange that er feller could hate the girl he
loves, but I could do it," he said, as he turned at
the end. "Howd's the devil git inter a feller
so? — specially about love affairs. Reckon it's
like mother's vinegar that she makes er honey
and water by sourin'. 'Spect the devil just sours
into us sometimes."

"Shan," said his mother at noon, "you'll
have ter go fer some stove wood after dinner,
lessen yer want ter eat yer meals raw. I've
been er pickin' up chips and scratchin' out cobs

in ther hog-lot long ernough. Better trot down ter ther 'timbuhs fawty.' ”

With the strong desire of youth to finish what it is doing, and be ready for any emergency, Shan wished very much to keep on ploughing. But he went out, dumped the “bed” off the wagon, hitched the mules to it, stuck his axe in a leather loop on the rear axle, humped himself upon the hounds of the running-gear, and drove into the forest.

“Funny thing,” he said, as he stopped in the timber, “ ‘bout how ther wood’s always gittin’ out in ther busy season. Mr. Bright says ‘Marryin’s all right, my boy, if yer don’t git one of these here stove-wood women.’ Guess he wasn’t ser lucky; father wasn’t, certain. Wonder how D—

“Wo-o-ah! Why, what’s ther matter with ther fool mules? Wo-o-uh, I tell yer! What’s that! Where’s that sound from? Seems like its under my feet; seems in ther trees. What is it, anyway. Wo-a-uh! Here, Pont, heh-uh! Listen!”

He got off and tied the frightened mules each to a limb. Then he listened again, and said again to the old pointer in a whisper, “Listen!”

The dog pricked up his ears as the faint wailing sort of hoarseness seemed to settle around them, rather than come to them. "See—weet," almost inaudibly hissed the boy between his teeth, and the dog started — his master following; "see—weet."

But they came to a tangle of hazel, smilax, and blackberry, which stopped the boy. When Shan got around it, the dog was running round, apparently baffled. Now the sound had ceased.

"Nose it, Pont."

The dog knew what that meant, and again and again threw his nose to the wind, running now here, now there, sometimes rearing up to reach higher above the vegetation. But still he could detect nothing.

They then went further on in the direction started, and just before they got near the "coal bank," Shan threw out his hand with a "Hie—on!" motion, and the dog again bounded forward. Only the gentlest breeze was blowing from the south, and as the old dog ran north of the dump of slate, he wheeled so suddenly that he fell, and, getting up, he crept, weaving this way and that, till he stood nearly still on the edge of the shaft. A pebble that he loosed

rolled into its mouth, when there came from its depths a screech that raised the hair on the dog's back and made the boy tremble.

In a moment Shan knew, and was leaning out over the hole and asking who was there.

"For God's sake, get me out some way, I'm nearly starved."

"Can you climb?" said the boy, thinking of his lines.

"Anything but a rope, and these infernal walls. I've made my hands sore trying."

"I'll cut er tree and poke it down ter yer, but yer'll have ter wait till I go to my wagon and git my axe."

When he returned and cut a long pole with the stubs of limbs left projecting, he, with much labor, thrust it carefully down the shaft, and while he steadied it, there came up to him the weak form and strange pale face of Arthur Linton, who grasped his hand in profuse gratitude.

"Golly, that was a funny squawl yer made. What yer been doin' down there?" said Shan.

"Trying to get out, mostly," replied Linton, explaining further to him.

"I can take yuh home, but I can't feed you

till I cut a little wood. That's what I come out for."

"Can't you take me down to Simpson's? I'm the railroad engineer. My men are down there."

"Certainly," said Shan, with alacrity. "Let's go ter my wagon."

The team was backed, geed and hawed, and the wagon bumped over stumps and bent down small saplings till they came out upon the smooth highway that ran the full length of the ridge. Down this they went, till they turned off into the branch road that went in at the Simpson gate, back of the house. As they crossed the line of the railroad, Linton saw by the stakes that the imperturbable Yake had been true to his work,—not concerned at all about the absence of his boss. The thing nettled him. It seemed that he had been gone a week.

When he got to the house, where the ladies only were at home, they expressed no surprise at his arrival till they saw his hungry face and heard of his predicament.

CHAPTER XXII

“ . . . I spake . . . this is the only witchcraft I have used.”
—SHAKESPEARE.

“Trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmations.”
—SHAKESPEARE.

SHAN had gone in with Linton, his head feeling that it had a legitimate excuse now. He was curious, also, to hear any further details of the engineer's story. He found himself thrilled as he heard the stranger tell how the treacherous ladder had broken when he was about half-way down and how the fall had stunned him; how, when he awoke, the stars were brighter above him than he had ever seen them; how long the dreary night was when the only sounds that came to him were the calls of whip-poor-wills and the occasional guffaws of the barred owls, mocking, it seemed, his own cries for help. Morning came at last, and he reserved his crying strength till he thought some one should be abroad; and when he heard the rattle of vehicles upon the ridge road (he now guessed

it was), he had screamed till they were beyond hearing, and had dropped back nearly exhausted.

Finally, with voice nearly gone, he gave up hope of this, and tried to climb out by bracing his hands against one wall, his feet against the other, but when half-way up, the shaft had widened and his strength had failed and he had fallen back again in a limp mass. He suspected that he must have been unconscious again, for what he next recalled was the clear projection against the sky of a turkey-vulture that passed and repassed his narrow vista, with tilting wing and a sinister eye turned sidewise down upon him. How distinctly, he said, had his deep, dark position enabled him to see the searching eye in the disgusting, naked head and the suggestive hook of the beak as it was turned up sidewise to the sky. Over and over him, again and again, the ghoulish thing floated, till he was sure by the frequency that there were more than one of them.

At last he heard a wagon nearer to him than any yet, and then he had set up the yells that had seemed so eerie to Shan and his mules. He had just simply screeched when the dog threw down the pebbles.

"Mr. McBride says he never heard such an unearthly sound from such an earthly place," he concluded.—Shan had not phrased it this way, however.—"I thought the occasion justified the outlay."

He reached down and hugged the dog up to him, and slapped Shan on the knee.

"I tell you, if it hadn't been for you two heroes, I should have been down on the baseline yet—and perhaps forever.

"These people down here, old fellow,"—still patting the pointer—"just hadn't thought of me. No, sir, not at all. Old Yake was setting slope-stakes, and Miss Dolly and her mother pegging away about their meals, and I—"

"Oh, now, you mustn't think it," said Mrs. Simpson, and Dolly chimed in, "No, indeed! he mustn't."

Linton had told his story well and Shan found himself wonderfully interested, but when he looked at Dolly's eager face, he felt his sympathy merge into something else—a sort of uncomfortable sensation that he could not name. He had felt it that day once before, when he struck the mules. Here he was, again, in the Simpson home, but certainly *he* was not

under consideration. As they plied the stranger with food and little delicacies of attention which their sympathy suggested, Shan felt that it was better to be the rescued than the rescuer,—that calamity might be bliss if ignorance was not.

"Why didn't you organize a child-hunting party and start after me, Miss Dolly, shouting, 'Child lost! child lost!'" said Linton.

"Why, we did think and talk much about you, but Paw thought that you might have stayed all night with some one up there, or maybe, he said, some of those depot-fiends had got you. But mother and I were very anxious."

Shan stole out unobserved, he thought, mounted upon his hounds again, and drove slowly around the house. He had to get off to open one gate, but when he came to the other that led out of the pasture, he found it open. He swore to himself that he had shut it, for it would have let the sheep out. The mystery was bothering him; but just then, as he passed through, there were two merry eyes peeping out beneath a bar, and between this and the next below a very pretty face was framed.

"Thank you," said the boy, in the dignity of his grammar. "How is your finger?"

"Oh, it's quite well, Shan, thank *you*. You are so kind and good, and always happening around so."

He began to pull on the hard mouths of the mules and they were slowing.

"*He* might have died," she added, "if you hadn't happened along."

Then he slapped the mules with the lines and rattled on; his head had the victory over his heart again. When he had driven a few rods further, he looked back, and saw her slim figure, striped with her brown braids down her breast and barred with the gray slats, writhing in muscular effort to lift the old gate "to," over the peg driven at the bottom to prevent the hogs from wedging it open. His heart began the struggle anew, and the jaws of the mules parted wide by the strain of the lines that was again set upon them; but just then the gate dropped over the stob into its place, and the lips of the mules met again around their bits.

Further up the ridge, he looked back through an opening in the trees. There were the grazing sheep, the green slope striped with their narrow paths, the brown home and gray out-houses beyond, and projected amidst them all

the slender figure of the girl standing still and gazing after him with a sort of longing in her lingering pose. As he drove into the deeper woods his heart reached up and "put its heel" upon his head again.

A year before a tornado had swept across the woods and levelled a narrow track of trees. To these the boy drove now to cut his mother's wood. He had been aware for some time that the air was rather odorous, when suddenly he heard Pont afar off howl with pain and suppressed rage. Shan "struck off" on a run, and found that the dog had attacked a large skunk, which, finding its usual methods of defence unavailing, had secured a piercing bite through the tender canine nose, and was holding on with a death-grip. Do what the dog would, he could not twist his mouth so as to engage his enemy's throat or chest. Since, also, he could not get loose, the howl was all he had left.

Shan grabbed a dead bough near by, and striking it against the earth till all the rotted branches broke off, he held his breath, ran in and stunned the skunk at a blow, so that it loosed its hold. Then he stood afar off and watched the old dog's vengeance as he tore

almost to fragments his vanquished foe. The boy rushed for the wagon, for he feared the dog's gratitude when he came in from his rage. So he climbed upon the load and waited till Pont, sick and exhausted, came staggering in.

"Lie down, old feller. Better let skunks er lone. Funny what makes dogs hate 'em so,— heap worse'n they do er thing that fights fair. This un seemed to be givin' you pretty good goods of the 'tooth and toenail' kind, however.

"Oh, yes, I'll take yer word fer it," as the dog gratefully looked up and seemed about to leap on to the wood. "I know you're grateful—grateful as some other folks, I 'spect. But I like gratitude at long range sorter, specially in your case. Funny game we've been findin', Pont. One's not quite so smellin' as ther other, though a feller must be a little 'gamey' when twenty feet er more under ground he can turn er dog er somerset at forty yards.

"Whe—e—ew, old boy, I'll have ter tie yer up in the stable fer a week when I get home. Go down ter the creek and git uh drink."

As his master motioned westward at the word "drink," the dog trotted off. Shan knew this

meant a swim also, and a probable decrease of odor. As he saw Pont coming back, apparently refreshed, he started his team and went, crushing brush and bending bushes, out to the road; and to the monotonous rattle of an untrimmed bough in the spokes of one of his wheels, he mused all the way home.

CHAPTER XXIII

“Some things are of that nature as to make
One’s fancy chuckle while his heart doth ache.”

—BUNYAN.

“Ambition is no cure for love.” —SCOTT.

THE next day, as Shan ploughed again, he had some queer feelings about his sweetheart.

He felt that Dolly regarded him in about the same light as he did Mildred — “awfully good, but —” He could conceive of nothing that he disliked so much as to have goodness set as a foil for an exception, and to belong to that class of the best of people, “but —”

His head got the mastery again, and plainly told him that he had no show against such a man as Arthur Linton, domiciled in her home. So far did he rebound from hope, that he fancied her as given up, and he felt a pride at his renunciation and a glory in his independence. She might *go*, so far as he was concerned.

There was not in him the even old thought of “other fish in the sea.” He had a holy contempt for the sex.

"‘Nothin’ sticks ter er man like er woman and er dog,’ Mr. Bright is always sayin’,” he muttered, “but dinged if there’s any comparison, lessen they’re like huntin'-dogs — jest foller the feller that’s got ther right sort er riggin’ on, or whistles right, or seems ter be goin’.”

He would — yes — he would yet quit farming, and make a man of himself — not a mere peg driver — a man of mark. Not, of course, to win her — she wasn’t worth the effort — but to humiliate her. And then pictures of his great success and wealth, and Dolly and Linton struggling and poor, with the contrast evident whenever he passed, went flitting through his mind. He struck the mules another needless lash, as he thought of her pitying him when she opened the gate. He would make her feel yet that he had never been an object of pity.

He ploughed a few more rounds, and stopping once to clear a hill of clods, he snatched up a stalk of corn that had grown far above its fellows.

If it had been Sol Jenkins only, in the matter, he thought to himself, he still might have some show, but who could meet this smooth engineer on his own ground? There

was no use fighting him. A woman liked a whipped man, anyway. Look how they had taken on over this feller, because he didn't have sense enough to know a rotten sapling. He was not much on fighting, anyway. Might be the whipped man himself. Then she was not *worth* fighting for. It was a case of "mother's honey and water turned to vinegar."

In turning awkwardly once he had ploughed up a hill of corn, and the mules had trodden down another. He had "set out" the one again, and propped the other up with clods, but now, after a few rounds, they were both wilted and drooping. His mood had changed.

He began to picture himself as a martyr—a suicide—a—a—anything to provoke not Dolly's sympathy, but her suffering and her remorse. Then his spirit rose in the last resort of exquisite politeness. He would treat her kindly—be nice to Mr. Linton, not go about her, but freeze her with his indifference.

"Been er heap er fellers again," he said, unhitching his team, as he put the trace-chain rings upon the tips of the hames.

A few nights later, when he came in from his

chores, his mother said: "Some fine lookin' feller's in ther parlor — wants ter see yer."

As he entered, his slouched hat in his hand, Arthur Linton rose from a corner and greeted him cordially.

"You must think I am very ungrateful, Mr. McBride, since I have not called on you sooner to thank you again for your timely help the other day. But I've really not been well since my shaking up and long fast, and they are such charming nurses at Mr. Simpson's that a fellow doesn't hurry up to get well, you know."

It was well that the gloom did not permit him to see Shan's face, else he would not have felt so easy.

"But I'm all right now," continued Linton, "and I thought I should like again to assure you how very, very grateful I am, and — "

"Oh, anybody'd er done it," Shan said indifferently. "Better thank mother, I reckon, or the fate that got her out er stove wood."

"However it is," said the engineer, "I'm indebted, and I should like to serve you any way I can. I shall have to be in the region for some time — as I just to-day got orders to take charge of the party of contractors that will cut the ridge

back of Mr. Simpson's house; also of the construction of the bridge over Coon Creek. At times a man in a strange land gets quite lonely. Can't you come over to see me? I shall be gone to Chicago soon for a short while, but after my return I hope to see a great deal of you. For my part, I hardly see how a fellow of your time of life can keep away from there. An old hardened bachelor like myself is scarcely proof against charms like those. Well, good-night, Mr. McBride. Give my regards to your mother, and tell her I have great reasons to rejoice that her needs lay so directly in the line of my own, that afternoon. Oh, by the way, could I see Pont?"

"Well, it's er little dark now, but yer can smell him without any trouble," said Shan, laughing, and then explained the situation.

"Oh, well, then, some other time, but since he seems to understand you so well, I wish you would thank him again for me. Good-night!"

"Now what's ther use fallin' out with er feller like that—plain tomfoolery, that's all. He and I are friends. We ought ter be. I allers love er man after I've done him good. Anybody does. Father says it's ther way ter

love ther world — do 'em good. I'm goin' over
ter see him — jest him."

Indeed, this chimed well with his mood of self-styled indifference. He would go to see Linton and freeze Dolly. But before he acted on his resolution of going over, Linton had gone to Chicago with his profiles and cross-section sheets, with his fossils and strata-sketches, to get directions from his engineer-in-chief.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Faith keeps many doubts in her pay."—THOREAU.

"But Nature has a higher end in the production of new individuals than security; namely, ascension."—EMERSON.

"All service ranks the same with God, whose puppets, best and worst, are we."—BROWNING.

THE "June meetin'" — "basket meetin'" — was coming on up at Nichols Chapel, and all the region round about for miles was expected to be there and bring its dinner. When at a casual meeting, some weeks before, Miss Hudson had said that Mr. Witmer *might* preach there that day, it fitted Shan's mood as well as his conception of the proprieties to ask her to go with him. She had been something of a horse-woman, and, feeling that she would enjoy the ride, suggested that they go horseback.

So at the proper time he put on his best clothes and grammar, put a side-saddle upon Ben and his own upon the filly, and "went by" for the teacher.

It was early June, when the birds having

reared their first broods were renewing their courting tactics for the second. The males were now again in the high places, charming their mates with a melody that made the second spring of the season. A shower had fallen the night previous, sufficient only to lay the dust and cool the air, which latter was moving gently.

"This is one of those rare days in June, Shan, which Lowell speaks of. It is about perfect."

"I'd like to see a whole year like this," said the boy.

"Well, it would be very monotonous and tiresome, I suspect. I always enjoy a change. Do you remember our talk about the beauty of contrast in the spring?"

"Yes, but why can't there be a perfect climate," he persisted.

"Oh, there could be, but you would have to know something of an imperfect climate to enjoy it, is my argument."

"I know," he replied, "but if everything was perfect, why could we not enjoy it as we enjoy the beat of hearts or the digestion of our food?"

"Do you really enjoy these things? You have no consciousness of their action. Enjoyment implies consciousness, consciousness implies appreciation, or being able to see differences in things, or choice, and this means that one thing must be better than another—that one, at least, is imperfect. Imperfection lies at the base of all enjoyment. Why, perfection means all things just alike—the loss of all individuality and identity even. Dolly would be no more to you than any one else. In fact, there would be no Dolly—no you. Instead of two souls with but a single thought, there would be an infinity of such with but a single idea."

"Yeh—es," he said thoughtfully.

"Then for all things to be perfect," continued the teacher, "they must be perfectly situated. With reference to some standard, there might be only one perfect place, and all things would be merged together into one perfect position, of one perfect form, of one perfect material, with one perfect character—and this would be God. Your law of everything perfect would tie the hands of the pure Creative Spirit, so that nothing could exist but itself. Imperfection is the basis of the universe."

"I see, Miss Winnie; I had not thought again. But why can't everything be made perfect for its work?"

"To a sufficient extent, it is. Your work is what *you* can do. If some one else is better endowed so that he can do your work easily, you may be sure that your work is not his, or his yours. A creature's work is what it *can do* — no more.

"But really no creature is made perfect for its work — nor should it be. The work has been allowed to make the creature, and hence the fitness of things which we see. These are never perfect, but *perfecting*, which means that imperfection is the outlook for progress — the basis of our *approach* to perfection."

She had slacked her rein, and they were riding slowly. Ben stumbled badly, rolling his nose under his body, and nearly throwing his rider over his head. Shan reached out and jerked him up, and said:—

"We must ride a little faster, Miss Winnie — and — and — hold yer rein tighter. This philos-erfizin gait don't suit Ben. I never knew him ter stumble with me, but I never rode him that slow."

Ben felt the disgrace, too, and went wonderfully better after that.

"Now that's what I'm talkin' erbout," said Shan. "Why couldn't er horse been made so he couldn't stumble?"

"Because he would have to be made so that he could not go," she replied. "Every step is a stumble—often an upward one—as Ben is going better now for his recent blunder."

They rode on silently for some time. The boy kept biting off pieces of his switch and casting them away, as if he were untying a knot in a rope or strap with his teeth. For some time he studied Ben's feet as he stepped. Later he looked up and said with a sort of satisfied air:—

"Yes, I reckon we can profit by our failin's—and progress by them too—if we had as much sense as er horse."

The teacher looked at him and smiled a little absently. She had been wondering why the Dickcissels liked to sing so at this hot hour of the day, and as she noted on a fence stake a young male that had not yet got his nuptial throat-patch, singing his monotonous ditty to charm some grass-hidden lass, she turned to smile at the

love-sick boy beside her, yet scarcely beyond his 'teens.

"Yes?"

"But what bothers me, Miss Winnie, is that Jesus allus seemed ter expect the same of them that stumbled as them that didn't."

"How, Shan?"

"Why, He never seems to consider — er — er — environment, as you would call it. He sets ther same example fer all men. Never says anything about stumblin' up — don't seem ter expect you to stumble at all."

"I think you mistake example for task, Shan. He gives Himself to all men as the same ideal, but He does not give all the same task."

They had ridden out of the limits of the morning's shower, and the dust was deep here. They drew their reins a moment to study the trail of a large snake that had run across the road in a series of smooth S-like depressions. Later they glanced up at the pretty circling of a hawk overhead, and spoke of the beautiful motions — the same curve of beauty in the earth and air. The boy's mind seemed yet to be struggling with a problem, for his brow was lowering.

"I've an awful temper, Miss Winnie. Jesus seemed to expect the same work from Peter with his weak nature that he did from John with his lovin' heart, and —"

"No, Shan, not that; but he expects the same progress away from the beginning — taking into consideration the means. A poor endowment is often a great endowment; it leaves such a long stretch for progress."

They reached the church platform for dismounting. She threw her knee off the pommel, fetched her skirts a flounce or two, loosed her riding-habit, dropped it, stepped out of its fluffy ring, picked it up, and handed it to the waiting boy, who, still on the filly, led Ben toward the woods to hitch. When he came back and was walking with her, he said slyly,—

"I never knew before that Ben was called to preach!"

She laughed at his irony, with a sort of shy delight in her face as they joined a group of friends.

CHAPTER XXV

"The Puritans hated bear-baiting . . . because it gave pleasure to the spectators." — MACAULAY.

"The surest way to hit a woman's heart is to take aim kneeling." — JERROLD.

WHEN the congregation began to gather in the house, Shan walked in with Miss Hudson. Other young men who had no girls lounged in the shade as usual, and some that did have girls waited until the house was filled, and then pulled buggies up under the windows and sat with their partners in them, soothing their consciences by striking one of those half-and-half conditions between courtship and worship which has been so delightful to us all for ages.

The brother who was to preach was afflicted with that depressing spirituality which no one was able to reach — though some professed it — and which he was never able to exhibit — not to mention practise — unless he had the pulpit stand between him and the world. He was tinged with the then faddish doctrine of sinless

sanctification, and wonderfully burdened with the sins of other people, heavy and light, especially the light, which were more apparent. Every form of enjoyment or pleasurable indulgence was a red rag to him, except, perhaps, tobacco and baseball. His shirt front was usually speckled brown with ambeer, and he had a son who was a noted pitcher, who even slipped out on Sunday occasionally to throw a curve.

He took for his text to-day, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" and he painted the expectation of God with such fervor, and the vengeance of Christ the Judge with such ardor and evident enjoyment, that he could scarcely be heard for the groans of the sanctified in the corner.

He was a man of great eloquence,—as eloquence "goes" with the country people,—having a favorite form of a series of long conditional phrases, with nearly the same words and almost the same sense throughout, and then a main clause which he finally brought in with a tremendous sort of guttural gnash that made the veins of his neck swell like those of an ox. The louder he ranted the more he thought the spirit was upon him; and, as his breath

came and went in great gusts, he, like Elijah, seemed to think that the spirit was in the whirlwind, and not in the still small voice.

He had begun lately to lose his voice, he said complainingly to some sympathetic sisters, though there was no evidence of it to-day. He didn't know why God was taking it from him, since he was doing such good work; when the fact was that God was having nothing to do with it. When he got so angry in the pulpit at not being able to make all men see with his eyes, he simply rasped his vocal chords into tatters, trying ill-humoredly to shriek men into reformation. His sanctification had hardly got above his shoulders yet.

It was a depressing sermon to Shan, and he felt himself muttering, "What's ther use er tryin'?" He walked out to dinner with rather poor relish. Miss Winnie soon drifted from him, while greeting her patrons, as those who sent to her school were styled; and a gossipy good time was going on generally, in which a broad spirit of hospitality and good feeling prevailed.

"Mighty pow'ful summon," said an old sister, who staked her hope of salvation on her belief

that the Lord's vengeance slipped over all her shortcomings and caught on to all those of her neighbors. She usually sent her dressed turkeys to town with the feet crammed inside and the gizzard left unopened, with a view to the avoirdupois of the pebbles.

"Pow'ful!" said another, whose market butter was always heavy with salt and a little lardy to the taste. "Young people got er terrubbul sturrin' up." She took her pipe out of her mouth and spat upon the grass. "I guess they need it."

Shan, despite his recent resolves, had been watching Dolly as she did the accustomed amenities of her "spread," and his heart was pushing him, inch by inch, around that way that he might fall within the circle of her courtesies, and get a piece of the pie or cake that she had baked herself. Anything of a casual nature he felt himself up to, but he could not walk boldly over to her yet. He was looking at her rather longingly, notwithstanding the recent resolution of his head to treat her coolly, when he bumped against Mildred Watkins.

"Now looker here, Shan McBride, I see

us than this snigger—a thing that culture leaves behind it in our childhood.

Mr. Witmer talked clearly over the heads of his rural audience. He used illustrations from travel, figures of boats and engines, which fell flat. He roused the attention of his audience only once, when he made some allusion to a stumbling horse going better for his fall, for his tightened rein and urging, and the danger of our falling in smooth places and at a slow gait. But there was a soothing spirit of love and tenderness in his talk, even where the thought was not understood. His very tones were helpful and hoping. The boy was touched again.

"Well, you did load Mr. Witmer a little this time, Miss Winnie," said Shan, as they rode home.

"About Ben? Yes, but I did not mean it so."

"I thought you had got all there was out of it. Do you know I like the illustration about the horse better than about the boats. I mean it helped me more."

The influence of Mr. Witmer's good English was on the boy, and he was speaking well.

"Why, I don't see," she said, "it was all simple."

"Yes, but that about Ben was so close to me."

"Yes?" she said reflectively.

There was quite a stretch of silence. They rode out among the "rat-tail" on the roadside to let some vehicles pass, and Shan's keen eye caught a hole in the leaning fence stake that he dodged under. Going up to church he had noticed a nuthatch somersault suddenly as it lit upon another stake near by this, and he felt sure now that in this hole, round and auger-like, which reminded him of a carpenter's work, was its nest.

"Jesus was a carpenter, wasn't he, Miss Winnie?"

"Yes, Shan, at least the son of a carpenter, at any rate."

"How strange that he never explained anything by his trade; never mentioned er splinter, er shavin' or cuttin' tool — jest preached from flowers, birds, trees, sowin', reapin', and so on. Funny, ain't it?"

"Why, yes, Shan; I never thought of it, though."

"You've helped me much in this way, Miss Winnie. I see nature in a new light since you've — you've — been — ser — kind ter — me."

"Thank you, Shan; I like to hear you say that, but —"

"But — but I don't seem ter be makin' much headway with human nature — oh, I don't mean you, Miss Winnie — I — I — mean — I saw er thing ter-day — I didn't understand. Er friend wuz cool ter me — fer — fer no cause."

"Yes — yes, I know, Shan," she said soothingly. "I can't help you there. Shallow human nature is like the ripple, and deep human nature like the pool — you cannot see far into either. We scarcely know ourselves."

He laughed a pained, silly laugh at her guess at what he meant. He thought he would be mysterious and bear the burden of Dolly's coolness alone, with the teacher's sympathy around him only in a general way. But here it was bold, positive — almost aggressive; still it touched him as something soothing to a sore.

"We can do nothing but wait and — and — trust a little," she added.

There was a long interval of silence. Both

sighed heavily several times from the weariness of the long day—it may be from some other causes.

"Won't you come in and rest awhile?" said the teacher, as they neared her home.

"No, thank you. Soon be time ter milk. Got *my* work ter do," he said significantly.

"Are you perfectly fitted for it?" she queried slyly, catching at his drift.

"Nome. Glad I ain't?"

"Why, Shan?" rather seriously.

"'Cause then I'd be a calf."

She laughed heartily at his application of the morning's talk.

"I'm glad you ain't perfectly fitted for yours either, Miss Winnie."

"Why, Shan?" a little seriously again.

"Then you'd be an angel."

She looked up quickly to rebuke him for his apparent flattery, but his face was so unconsciously solemn that she only bade him good-by, and thanked him for the day, as she stepped off on the stiles.

"What fools we are," she mused, as he was going off, "to think we know any one. That boy is deepening day by day and does not half

know himself, and I—I—" But she seemed to close the door upon the thought and shut it outside, as she went into the house.

As Shan led Ben along toward home and recalled Dolly's purposeful coolness, he glanced at the empty saddle beside him, and thought that he had never before seen any side-saddle seem—quite so empty.

CHAPTER XXVI

"A nature sloping to the southern side." — LOWELL.

"There is a pleasure sure in being mad which none but mad-men know." — DRYDEN.

IT was the last of June when Arthur Linton came back and brought with him all the paraphernalia of a railroad contractor's outfit. Really *he* came with *it* rather — the muddle of tents, teams, wagons, ploughs, scrapers, shovels, spades, forges, and so on — and took up again his abode in the Simpson home.

No one could resist his genial presence, and Dolly was rejoiced to see him back. Even Sol Jenkins had ceased to come now — not caring, he said, to waste ammunition where he could bring down no game. The jovial engineer had even captivated him in a casual meeting, so that he felt that all his story-paper reading would be of no avail against a man like that.

Linton's duties were rather light. He had only a few grade-stakes to set here and there, and to see the work properly done. He went down occasionally to the quarry, to see that the

stone for the bridge piers and the near-by culverts was not flawed or rotten.

Ever present was his flora and magnifying-glass. On one of his walks there were great straggling clusters of *penstemon*, whose inflated, half-grown, white corollas Dolly had "popped" by squeezing, ever since her babyhood, as they grew up in the hard pasture among the "seed-tick grass." Linton altogether had spent many hours trying to figure out what part that one hairy, aborted stamen, so unlike the four others, played in cross-fertilization, as he had watched the ants and small native bees crawl in and out among the bent filaments.

Coming home late one afternoon, he found Dolly digging, ever so accidentally of course, over her bed of plants in the front yard; and she called to him to come and name for her a flower that had just opened.

"Nellie Judkins gave the seed to me," she said, "but she didn't know its name — just said it was awful pretty, and it *is*," she added, with emphasis.

"I cannot now tell you its name," he said, "because I should have to destroy this only blossom to analyze it. But if you will stoop

here a moment, I will show you that there is much of interest about a flower besides its name and beauty. In the first place, I can see at a glance that if you were to cover this with netting you would never get any seeds."

She looked up at him with a queer kind of wonder in her face. He had taught her the names of the parts of the flowers, such as stamens, pistils, sepals, petals, and so on, and had found her an apt and interesting pupil.

"This flower," he said, "is fertilized — made so it will bear seed — by insects exclusively." And he stooped and explained to her the intricate structure for these purposes. When he took his pencil-point and put some of the sticky pollen between the lobes or lips of the stigma, and they closed quickly together, she uttered an exclamation, and looked a glad sort of gratitude into his face that almost scared him.

"Flowers seem to like to attract bees for this purpose. Bees are fond of pollen as well as of honey. So this flower has its true stamens away in there out of sight as a bee flies, but, look! Upon the broad lower lip of the corolla, there are painted most perfect *pictures* of luscious stamens, with anthers fairly overflowing

with orange-golden pollen — every detail of form, shading, and color complete."

They bent their heads together to see better.

"Even the perspective is correct," he added.
"Let's step a yard or two away and note how deceptive is the whole effect."

As they arose they bumped their faces together, and laughed, apologized, and blushed.

"Why, how perfect and how interesting — I never thought — I would love — Mr. Linton —"

"Is — is — Henry at home?" stammered Shan, after he had said from his saddle almost over them, a blunt "Good-evenin'," which had startled the wits out of them.

"Why — er — no, Mr. McBride" (she had never called him that before). "He rode off a few minutes ago. Won't you get down?"

"No, thank you," said Shan, with much dignity. "Which way did he go?" not knowing what else to say, while the filly was turning.

"Why, I think down that way," indicating with a nod the road leading toward the Jenkins' home.

"Maybe I can overtake him," came to Shan as a husky excuse for suddenly riding off and going rapidly.

He cared nothing about seeing Henry. In fact, he had come over to see Linton — accepting his invitation — recalling his words about being lonely.

"He didn't seem ser blamed lonely ter-night," Shan muttered. He was sure this time that he had not gone with any intentions or direct purpose of seeing Dolly. Of course he had expected that he *might* see her, and be indifferent to her; but he had not counted upon the condition of seeing her cheek against Linton's face and words of love upon her lips. It brought him back again to desperation.

If Dolly had ever completed what she began to say, it would have been thus: "I would love, Mr. Linton, for you to meet my teacher, Miss Winnie Hudson." If both Linton and Shan had heard this out, this story might have ended with this chapter.

As the sorrel filly went racking off with that peculiar synchronous half melody, half racket, that shows the animal well trained in this gait, Linton leaned far out over the fence and saw with admiration the neat handling of her feet, and almost revered the graceful sitting of the rider.

It is not at all wonderful that the ancients conceived the idea of the Centaur, if their men rode then as our Missouri boys do now.

To-night not only did horse and rider blend in motion but in mood, and the dare-devil manner of exhibiting it. The soft pressure of the boy's knees, the slight shifting of his weight in the saddle, forward or aft, indicated to the mare the proper speed; the pressure on the bit told her every detail of the gait desired—the very jerk she should give her feet—while the merest swaying of the body this way or that guided her at his will.

There is something very inspiring to a healthy person in the feel of a strong, vigorous horse beneath. The very animal life of a well-gaited saddle-horse seems to throb upward into the man, while the intelligence of the rider thrills downward into the beast.

The fact that the filly racked well, that Shan rode well, and that Linton leaned far out and admired, were mere trifles, but large factors in our little story.

How wildly the boy rode, with desperation in his heart and gait! He could not think consecutively. Only great gushes of purpose rose

here and there, as though the filly's heart might have inspired them — purposes that he did not like to own as his — and then they subsided, rose again further on in a new form, and fell again.

There was little in the wayside to distract him. The voices of the summer twilight were not at their crest yet, but now and then a familiar bird, which he would have sworn never uttered a note in the night, broke out into a fragment of its song as his noisy riding disturbed it. Once a catbird either awoke or sang out in his sleep, and a brown thrasher, late retiring as usual, "se-checked" at him as he passed.

Where he would have gone he hardly knew, or what desperate thing he might have done he could scarcely conceive. Finally he dropped his rein and the mare was walking leisurely.

Suddenly he ducked his head, crouched on the mare's neck, and dodged something which, behind him, seemed like a great Herculean club, hurled at him from above. It had a weird, shuddering sound, and appeared to jar the very earth as it passed. It came evidently from above, and the aerial shriek of its speed

increased rapidly as it approached and died out as suddenly after it passed, only a few yards further on.

Instantly the mare was gone, and he found himself behind his shallow saddle, clinging to the mane only — his stirrups alternately thrashing him and the frightened steed.

At last, when her speed slacked a little because of fatigue, he got forward in his saddle, regained his reins, slowed the filly up and turned her, nervous and champing her bit, toward home.

The incident had quenched his mood. It was years after before he knew what it was that had frightened him, and he felt that in some way this had been sent to him as a special providence to drive away some awful thoughts that, for an instant, had seemed to hover just above his head on the border of a dreadful purpose.

In all his life, after that, he never saw the bull-bat swoop (as he called the night-hawk) that he did not shudder and feel thankful for the fright one had given him once, and that he did not realize the aptness of calling it a "night-jar."

At last, when he went in home, late, the male house-wren, whose mate was sitting in a knot-hole in the barn, rattled from the tree near by, where he roosted, a peculiar twitter which Shan had never heard in the daylight. Of course, as he walked in under the trees, the mockingbird, which then, before a price was set upon his song, built in our Missouri yards, awoke and sang awhile, even after he had gone to bed.

Next day Shan felt a keen relish—a sort of vengeance—as he drove the new self-binder into the ripened wheat, and saw it sickle it to its death, and, binding it into bundles, cast it aside, with a contemptuous twirl. There was a kind of enjoyable cruelty that he had often felt before, when a child, in meeting the great wave of gold as it came welling up from the windward, and hurling it to its destruction.

It seemed like a verification of the Old Testament prophecies against the prosperity of the wicked.

The sweltering heat rose up at him, as defiant as his mood, and hazed the hot air into a faint mirage, which seemed to lift high the further end of the wheatfield and shake it as a blanket.

The Dickcissel—or “little meadowlark,” as some of Shan’s neighbors called him, turning his brazen throat toward the sun, seemed to chime his iterant, unmusical song with the heat’s quaver; and the field-sparrow, mounting a high twig to catch the breeze, said, “Whew, whee-u-whee-u-wheu wheu whe-we-we-wewy! how hot it is.”

But the boy only mopped the streaming sweat from his eyebrows with the sleeves of his cotton working-shirt—disdaining the kerchief tied loosely around his neck. He rejoiced to suffer. There was, after all, a sort of spiritual consolation in physical suffering, much as the soul finds relief in tears.

That night, after he had gone in to supper, Arthur Linton came and bought of him the sorrel filly, paying his price without a word. He was going to take her home with him, he said. He praised loudly the mare’s training; and nothing mollifies a Missouri boy more than to be assured that he knows how to bring a horse up in the way it should go. He thought Linton’s taste equally as fine about women, but, somehow, he could not get the same comfort out of it. He wished he could give up Dolly

as easily as he could part with the filly, and be done with the whole thing.

As Linton led the mare off Shan felt a sadness at her going, because of the associations connected with her, yet he was glad also to be rid of her, because, he feared, her moods were too much like his own. He felt that he needed no such stimulation as the filly gave.

CHAPTER XXVII

"If I am not worth the wooing, surely I am not worth the winning." — LONGFELLOW.

"Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self." — KEATS.

OF course Miss Hudson could not well close her school without an exhibition, unless she chose to violate all the traditions of the region. She was not very well acquainted with the expectations of the people, so she had allowed the boys and girls to make their own selections for recitation and declamation, as perhaps best reflecting the popular taste.

While she might tolerate Sparticus indefinitely defying the Roman gladiators, Patrick Henry's wail for death if he could not get the single tax, and the eternal anguish of the Soldier of the Legion, yet her pedagogical and ornithological instincts drew the line at the poem of Rizpah fighting the vultures away from her dead sons *at night*.

"I do not think any vulture flies in search of prey at night — even in Palestine. The Bible

certainly does not say so. Read Second Samuel twenty-one, tenth verse, and get some other piece, Sissy."

At last all things were ready. A few days before, the larger boys in school, with many volunteers from outside, had built against the house, in front, an arbor of green boughs, and erected a stage, and placed rude seats of slabs from Durkee's mill upon it. Here the exhibition was to be given, while the school-house itself was left as the green-room of the occasion.

Of course Dolly was there. She had "a part" that had been delivered early; and Linton was there with a bored expression on his face. Shan stood out among those of the men who had gallantly given their seats to the ladies.

The little ones were all through with their dialogues and tableaux, and fond parents had broad grins in view of their success; and from larger boys had come some speeches which argued that they might yet grow famous by wrangling their neighbors into discontent, but, as the fathers felt, of course, better expressed by "shaping the destiny of the nation."

Dolly was more to Shan than a poem in dialogue, a picture in color, or a symphony in

motion, as the novelist would express it. She was an ecstasy in æsthetics to him to-night, though his heart did not phrase it that way. But his head had simply said "Hunuh," in his surprise at her frills, and the foolish, sordid thought came into it, "What would she cash out fer, I wonder," as if she were the filly and he still wished to get rid of her.

But to him the teacher was a revelation. Why, she didn't look any older than Dolly, he thought. Those who had seen her come and go to church supposed they had seen her "dressed up." But to-night she had gone to the depths of her trunk, which held things of other days, when in their time of plenty she was just budding into a woman at the old eastern college.

She hesitated a moment, and wondered if she might not wear her old graduating-dress, which she had recently rather modernized. There would be no one there who would ever know it. She believed she would?—questioning herself.

So to-night she looked a mass "er snow-cream sweetness" one gallant had ventured—"not er keerin' who heard him—unh!" as

some one gave him an "elbow-hunch" not to be so loud. She seemed to float, rather than step, about the stage.

There had been a streak of gray cloud on the western horizon, and Linton, with his usual consideration, born of much exposure in the field, had brought his rubber coat, and was sitting near the stage with it yet lying across his knees, as Miss Hudson and Dolly came out to sing a duet.

When the rich alto rose, the face of the engineer ceased its bored look, and it seemed as if its owner were in a dream. Some pictures of his boyhood were coming back, and his eyes were fixed upon the dress, which reminded him of a graduating scene when he himself was a student, at an engineering school up North, where he had loved and quarrelled with the sweetest, sweetest girl that ever wore a dress like that. That figure too and that voice—He wished he could see her face. The bad light and long bangs, and the slight turning away, hindered.

"What is the teacher's name?" he whispered to a woman near him.

"I fergit."

"Oh, never mind."

A self-important boy was standing just behind the pair, holding high a kerosene lamp, that they might see the music. Partly because he was peeking around it to see who was admiring him in the crowd, and partly because his wrist was tired, it happened that when the wind puffed up and broke the chimney, he let the lamp turn in his hand toward the teacher's shoulder; and a tongue of flame leaped from Miss Hudson's dress sleeve and licked at the now dead leaves of the arbor above.

In that flash, Linton knew where he had seen that face; and all that Miss Hudson knew, for a little while, was that there was the smell of rubber about her head and the strong arms of some stranger around her body bearing her from the stage. When poor shuddering little Dolly straightened up and shook herself on the outer edge of the crowd, it was not Henry at all who held her hand and assured her that neither she nor any one else was hurt.

There had been much screaming and scrambling generally, and the exhibition was ended, of course; but there were hearts full of gratitude that Linton's rubber had swept out the

flame before it reached the brush. With all that crowd of little ones, some one would have been badly burnt had the arbor kindled.

Linton was the hero of the evening, and these simple folk had gone around to tell him so ; but all that he could remember was the dropping of a lovely burden and the grasp of two soft hands, with, "Arthur! How came you here?" and a face so close to his that he could have kissed it, as he ought. He thought afterwards that he might have said "Winifred!" as suddenly as she had said "Arthur!" but he was not sure now of even this.

Then came the memory of all the dreary suffering of an unanswered letter—a letter fraught with penitence, and a long-ago promise to call on her to-morrow afternoon. But that letter had miscarried and that to-morrow had never come.

She was not burned — only a sleeve of her old graduating-dress had gone up in the sweetest incense. Why had he never written her after that silly quarrel, she wondered? and why had not *she* written?

Ah! Pride! Pride! And he had gone back to his southern home, and she had come west.

If he had not ridden the filly, Arthur felt that he would go home with her to-night in the farmer's wagon. Perhaps Henry would ride the mare home.

No, there he was with Sissy Jenkins holding to his hand, scared yet, and, from all appearances, she was going to stay scared. So he rode home alone—speaking into the Simpson wagon, answering Dolly's prattle occasionally in an absent-minded way.

When he was called down to breakfast next morning, he found a messenger ordering him into town to meet the chief, the president, and some other high officials of the road. Again he wrote a note, which old man Simpson put in his coat pocket, where it lay for many months, though, mistaking the remembrance of his intention for his deed, he was sure that he had delivered it to Mr. Bright.

The next day after the exhibition, Shan hauled the teacher and her trunk into town to take her train for her Minnesota home. They let nature much alone, for their hearts were full of other things now.

The sorrow of their separation lay heavily upon them. They talked about that, and in his

mood of woe Shan spoke of this other sorrow, about Dolly's indifference; how Mr. Linton had come in and charmed her, how *he* was pleased with *her*, and how there was no longer any hope for himself. Then he wept in his double desolation — this great brave boy who could have had his arm amputated without a wince; and she wept with him as they jolted along — in a woman's sympathy purely, he thought, just as Mildred had cried; but she knew that it was more than this, though this was in it. Her heart was burdened with a sorrow of its own: "Why did he not write? — or come?"

"I'll never forget you, Miss Winnie, should you not come back. But you must come back. God knows, life has been a new thing ter me since you climbed inter that old wagon. We send missionaries to the heathen. Why don't some one send missionaries, like you, out to us plain folks to wake us up to all God wants to do for us?" He spoke well now as a tribute to her departure.

And as the train pulled out he strained his eyes at the fluttering kerchief from the chair-car window, and turning, he looked into Arthur

Linton's sorrowful face, while the tears were yet upon his own.

"I'm too late, I see," said Linton, with much regret in his voice, though it was well under control. "There has been some mistake. I did not know till a moment ago that Miss Hudson left to-day. Did she leave me any message?"

"No, she's gone," the boy said dolefully, half sobbing; "the noblest woman, the best friend I ever knew is gone."

She had been to Shan what Titbottom's teacher had been to him—"a well of cool, deep water" into which he had "*looked—and seen the stars.*"

CHAPTER XXVIII

"My days were not the days of the week, bearing the stamp of any heathen deity, nor were they the minced hours by the fretting of a clock."—THOREAU.

"Who does not suffer in his spirit during drought and become restless and unsatisfied?"—BURROUGHS.

"Bury me on my face, because in a little while the world will be turned upside-down."—DIOGENES.

THE summer waned with Shan at varied work. After the corn was ploughed and reploughed, it was "laid by"; not, however, till he had gone over it with the single "diamond" plough—the mould-board next the hills to cover the high grass.

The oats-harvest came on, and the shocks stood shiftlessly a long time in the fields, daring a forbearing Providence, while they waited for a thresher to come by—so that the labor of stacking might not be necessary. When the rains chanced to come and the grain rotted, men gathered in little knots or met in "organizations" at the school-houses, and said a new political administration was needed.

Then came the cutting of meadows, put off because of the pressure of other work,—the timothy-heads now half stripped of their seeds at the top and the thickening undergrowth of blades compensating at the bottom.

Shan was early and late afield now, the mower was a-clatter, the rakes and stackers went to and fro, till the great ricks stood browning in the midst of the greening sward. The earth stood out once more as the factor beneath her work, the square walls of vegetation along the fences and down the draws, beyond the sickles' reach, showing contrastingly what she had done since she awoke in the spring. A little later there was the flush of the second growth over all the newly cut fields; and the easy curves of swell and swale rounded out again the form of nature, till the freshened landscape, smooth as a stripling's face newly shaven, looked as though it had renewed its youth.

At very early morn or very late afternoon the long shadows lay dark and clear-cut upon the thickening aftermath, and, as they lengthened from the setting sun, the young prairie chickens strolled out of the tasselled corn to feed on grass-hoppers, and the young hares crept from the

hedges, or from the ragweed fringe of the draws or fallows, to nibble the second-growth clover.

Finally the thresher came — the first steamer in the region — snorting along the highway, crushing culverts, frightening teams, and dragging after it its load of machinery and a string of curious farmers. Women and children met it at the cross-roads, and others peeped at it between the fence rails as it passed.

Men stooped in the highway over its broad barred and rippled tracks, and shook their heads; and their next representatives must introduce into the legislature measures of restraint upon its passage through the country.

"It must have a team hitched at its head," etc., etc, they said. It looked too much as if progress had broken loose from the four walls of the factories and the two rails of the tramways, and was running riot almost across-fields.

It was Shan's part at his home threshing to haul in the shocks of oats. As he went out early, and, with a steel-tined fork, swung the bundles up to Charlie Watkins, the loader, the young prairie chickens fluttered up from the dewy stubble between the shock rows, where the spiders' webs lay sparkling, and dropped in

the "bluestem" of the yet unbroken forty, where the two-year-old steers were grazing, and throwing out their tongues with a snort of exertion at the blanket of black flies upon their shoulders.

Here and there, in the merest depression of the soil only, sat twin young doves of the second broods — foolish and fuzzy in their innocence, while the mother was leading Pont a wild chase and giving him some lessons in the art histrionic.

Others of the first brood were feeding in the Hungarian millet patches, offering tempting targets to the wing-shot as they fluttered up ; or they went by, in straggling twos and threes, with whistling wings. Later in the day they streamed off to drink at the hard-pan ponds, or sat upon dead limbs and jerked their pretty heads above the water.

One of the threshing crew — "hands" they called them — grew sick, and Shan was glad to take his place at the fascinating work of travelling around and cutting bundles, or poking them down the humming separator's insatiable maw.

And thus went out July ! with that sweltering heat by day and that sultry calm of the night, found in the corn-belt. As he traversed the dry roads from farm to farm the old dust-colored

grasshopper, which as a barefoot he had chased for fun, somersaulted before him now as then, and lit with its head toward him at times in its old suspicious way. On the sides of the narrow lanes the rat-tailed plantain was going away and its conqueror the rat-tailed ragweed, gray with the flying earth, was crowding back the other ragweeds and the dogfennel, and was creeping into the trodden pastures. The people, horses and vehicles, that came and passed were without form and void in the chaos of the dust-cloud around them.

Sometimes the crew of threshers broke tent at midnight, and awoke the farmer and his dog, as well as the nightly echoes, by puffing along to meet a far-off engagement. Then there were at this hour not so many teams upon the road to meet and frighten, and so many chances of damage suits for broken wagon-tongues. Besides, the method of crossing culverts and bridges was not at this hour subject to such close inspection.

At these times, Shan noticed, even so early as three o'clock, that some birds were abroad — even the bee-martin, or kingbird, was giggling his taunting tyranny somewhere, and later many songsters that he thought had ceased their music

for the year sang yet in the cool dawning, with a glad spring-like exultation. How active was the field-sparrow! He thought that he was only a hot-hour bird. And here was the lark-sparrow, spreading the white of his outer tail feathers broadly, like a miniature turkeycock, and trilling and jarring out his little song, which Shan had thought the late gloaming only heard.

Once he heard a chewink, with a new loud strain that he had never heard before at any other hour — so new that had he not, when he came nearer, heard a familiar twitter as an undertone, he would not have known the bird. The indigo-bird also was not a heat-of-the-day singer only, and the cardinal was whistling “Wheat-year, wheat-year, wheat-year, sure! sure! sure!” the same as if the wheat were not now already safely in the bin.

Robins, catbirds, thrashers and familiar friends took up their springtime songs anew for a little while — the new part of the day being like the new part of the year — and even the bluebird warbled a bit of his old April optimism.

Overhead once, while it was yet too dark to see, Shan heard the thistle-bird's “pick-at-a-pea” call, telling how, like a woodpecker, he was

playing at fast and loose with gravity and how, in festooned streaks of lemon and black, he was trying to decorate the very air even, for his July wedding.

At times, long streams of blackbirds, with their moulting wings whistling weirdly, flew over him, along some definite fly-lines or aerial lanes, the same from day to day, as they passed between some favorite feeding-places in the cornfields and some favorite couches among the thick leaves miles away.

Near midday, over in the dry pastures, sere from the want of rain, the cows stood in the ponds—half water, half mire—and switched their bushy tails, while the young horses bunched themselves in hot groups under some lone tree and stretched their necks above each other's backs to dodge the hateful throat-fly, and pounded the earth with stamps to drive the bot-fly off.

In the dusty corners of the fence, the sheep stood along the road closely huddled, with their noses to the ground to baffle the nose-bot; and the geese jerked at the short grass of the nearly bare slopes, where their white forms fairly glistened in the sun.

Through the day they passed troops of "half-handed," sunbonneted women and children, picking the low blackberries in the narrow lanes; and over the careening fences the red and yellow harvest apples looked luscious upon the trees of the roadside orchards, while the boys envied the birds their wings as the jays and redheads sank their beaks into the juicy pomes.

On the western horizon, as the sun passed further on, the bank of foamy thunder-caps boiled up, white and airy, as if the sky would amuse or mock the hoping, thirsting earth with a play of blowing bubbles in her face. Then they shrank away, leaving no dark and watery cloud-streak — "like the weeping eyelash of the day."

Men stopped each other and asked when it was going to rain, and told their signs and their ancestors' signs, and spoke of the faint hints on which they hung their hopes that the drought might break.

Thus the day. As the sun set, with heightened hope still deferred in its coppery-purple beams, making the sky above seem green with envy at the beauty of the mists below, the tobacco-moth dipped its long trunk into the Jimpson

vases, now open wide; the quails wallowed in the dusty road, and the little hares kicked high their furry heels along the shady patches, and ran into the weeds at the approach of the puffing monster. Off from the highway could be heard the cries of children in their play, tiring themselves for their sleep—in wild, free action drinking deep of nature's best soporific. Then the night-hawk circled overhead, and darkness came on, leaving over the fields and lots, in the pestilent whiteness of the dogfennel, spurge, and boneset, the ghost only of the day's floral beauty.

At night they were often belated. Besides the bat that whirled against the sky then, the screech-owl had now begun to set up again his shuddering wail. One night when Shan was "blue" and homesick, there came with this sound the single cry of a raincrow or cuckoo's choking call. Shan hailed this gladly as the herald of a shower. But the owl kept up his cry again and again, and seemed to follow the rattling, puffing cavalcade, as though he would curse it with his wail. Shan was behind, driving the team hitched to the water-tank one night, when the bird lit on a stake near, and seemed,

as Thoreau has put it, to say, "Oh-h-h-h-h:
that I had never been bor-oo-oo-oo-ooo-r-rr-r-n."

The suicidal cry seemed aimed so directly at the boy that it was doubly depressing. He felt that it was the knell of all that he had ever hoped. He would have slain the bird, if he could, and he missed it only a little way with the lash of his whip.

"What makes uh bird, that's married early and raised uh family, keep goin' on that uh way fer, anyway?" he muttered, back deep in the vernacular which hard work and poor associations had set up. "He was through nestin' in April. 'Splenty ov time, anyway, for next year's courtin', lessen he's fond er long engagements. He don't raise er second brood, like some er these singin' birds. Glad he don't. Oughtn't ter be no second erditions of er bird like that.

"Now these other birds, some of 'em have er new courtship with every new brood. Glad I ain't a bird that way! One courtship's erbout to do me up. Think of three in er year, all with ther same sweetheart, too, like er house-wren; but then, if they wuz all successful—that's another thing. Ther Lord deliver me from three er year, all gone wrong.

"Many birds have some conserlation, however—have a rest sometime. Some boy-birds jest can't love a girl-bird in ther winter ter save 'em — jest *can't*. They ain't constitooted that way. And she don't keer nothin' fer him, neither. Sometimes they fight, like as if they wuz still married, 'bout which one will stay at home and which will go hunt a new home-hole; and then they have their 'kiss-and-make-up' spell in ther spring ergin—or git a new partner.

"But in man this everlastin' love business goes by jerks all the year round — liable to ketch yer any time, like ther measles, or sumpthin'. There's meeting all the Sundays, picnics in ther summer, fairs in ther fall, parties in ther winter, and Christmus is hardly past with its specially dangerous time, till spring's here with it's sentemental feelin's and ther dogged bugs and birds and things, spurrin' yer on with their songs and antics, and—and—er lot er confounded accerdents ter boot.

"I wisht I wuz out of it. Thought I wuz out. Would er been, if that keerless boy with his lamp had died er baby. Somebody had ter carry her out at ther fire and I—I—I—went in,

but I — I — didn't know she was goin' to reach fer a feller's neck like that. 'Twas cause she was skeered, I reckon, and that don't count. Nothin' seems ter count much with me here lately. But ther feel of that arm erbout a feller's neck!"

Thus went the early part of August! Autumnal hints were blushing forth, as the tired crew worked its way in a circle homeward. The tassels of the corn were sere, and the silks brown and dead. Here and there, some leaves upon the trees showed the colors of early ripening, not due to frost or drought.

On the roadside the wild cherries were swelling into a dark mahogany tone, and robins, flickers, redheads, jays, and others were enjoying the fruits of some old ancestor's sowing. The tight-fisted clusters of the sumac's sour berries were warm with ripening red, and their leaves were maturing in bright crimson patches. Wherever the Virginia creeper had run up and bunched itself on the fence stakes, rounding and softening their rugged beauty, there was a colored leaf peeping out; and the prairie grapes hung from the roadside rails in blue, acid clusters.



The autumnal reign of brilliant yellow, "fringing the roads with harmless gold," flaunting its banners from the corners and the hedges, caught the boy's uncultured eye. Besides the many summer flowers yet persisting, there were clumps of black-eyed Susans—"nigger heads," Shan called them, because of their black, woolly centres; and there was the bold effrontery of the various wild sunflowers. In the damp places was the brilliant gold of the tall *coreopsis*,—big Spanish needles, they appeared to the boy,—and here and there, over these and the last, the dodder or "love vine" threw its tawny yellow filaments in contrast to the bright green leaves and the dead drab of the fence rails.

On the prairie waysides was the compass plant, in perfect chrome, whose associations always made the boy sick, as he recalled an attempt to use as chewing-gum its resin before it had sufficiently hardened. For days his teeth were sticky and meals tasted tarry; and so desperate did he become that he submitted to the ordeal of having his mother scrub his teeth with a stick and a rag dipped in spirits of camphor to get the resin off. Ugh! He had always hated the rank thing since, and

liked to hear his breaking plough tearing at the tough roots — even if it did struggle to show the prairie wanderer the north and south with its deeply cut, flat, thin leaves, so turned as to avoid the drying sun.

It was a relief to rest his eyes upon the modest partridge-pea ("weed locust" — he styled it) growing in the hard roadside; or to glance at the early stubbles or fallows, brightening now with the brassy glory of the so-called Spanish needles.

At this he thought of Miss Winnie and her challenge that he saw too much of color to be discriminative, and he guessed that there were great beyonds about flowers as there were about "fishin', birds, and things."

The very feel in the air was autumnal. As he rode homeward at last, free from his contract, he felt himself, in the dusk, drop suddenly into cool pools of atmosphere in the swales, and a breeze began to spring up early in the sultry night. Next morning, when he stepped out on the porch at home to see the "devil's darnin' needle," as he called the *phasma*, or stick-insect, which had spent the summer on the climbing rose, he noted that though he left it a

bright green color (slightly browning) it was now as sere and faded as a frosted blade of grass.

He wondered if it were fading for death, or just preparing for further life — putting itself in harmony with Nature by changing protectively to the color of her paling face.

CHAPTER XXIX

"The pointer ranges and the sportsman beats . . . lynx-like
is his aim." — BYRON.

"Words pay no debts. Give her deeds." — SHAKESPEARE.

AFTER Shan had rested a few days, he felt that he must relax himself with a chicken-hunt. Returning from a near-by store where he bought his ammunition, he fell in with Linton, out to exercise the filly.

He told the engineer of his contemplated sport, and saw such a hungry look in his eyes that he asked the stranger over next afternoon to join him.

"Get Henry's new gun. I've got the dog," Shan called as they parted.

"Well, I should say you had," called back Linton. "That's what I'm coming for, to see Pont work."

As Shan rode on he found his motives rather mixed. He did not like to hunt alone. "Nothin' ter stimulate a feller." He could not resist the charm of the engineer's manner and apparent

good-will and sincerity. Besides, he wanted to show this accomplished fellow that there were some things a country boy could do as well as anybody. Then there was that eager hungry lonesome look in Linton's face.

"But dinged if I thought he was thinking about Pont. Thought he wanted a shot at a sort of game he'd never seen."

The truth was that Linton knew how to get his gun off, and had broken some flying targets in a city club. He had never been in the field, but with his easy confidence in himself, he supposed that he would do well.

Shan had told him that he need not come early—not earlier than three o'clock.

He had taken his round among the contractors, and now, a little early that he might have time to loiter, was riding over, his cultured eye pleased at the purpling effects of the thistles and the sensitive briars on the banks, the bunches of "blazing star," the false dragon-heads, and the horsemint in the fence corners, and the sweeping beauty of the pestiferous iron-weeds everywhere over the pastures.

He leaned down from the saddle on the filly's back, and plucked a bunch of the blue gentian

with its half-opened corolla — cobalt blue inside and green outside — and dropped the reins as he tried to determine why the plant — once, evidently, such a beautiful feature of the landscape, had begun to hide its colors and lose its shape.

Then there was a “woof! woof!” by the roadside, and a rush of hogs unseen through the shaking weeds, and new problems were upon him. He was splitting the wind at a terrible speed, and the dropped reins were just aft of the filly’s ears. But problem number one — how he was going to reach those reins on the bobbing head — was soon crowded out by number two, which was how, with a gun in his hands and a game-sack heavy with shells slapping him anywhere, he was going to stay in that saddle, if that mare made another turn like that last one.

The filly was a sort of problem-solver herself at times, and before any mental solutions came to Linton, she had accomplished the mechanical one of stretching her neck above the old lot gate at Mr. McBride’s, and emitting a sort of long, satisfied sigh, as if this were a thing she did every day merely for exercise.

"Why, say, feller," said Shan from the barn-shed, "I'm glad ter see you, but you needn't ter been in such a hurry. The chickens are not out of the corn yet."

"It was not I that was in the hurry," laughed Linton back at him. "The filly seemed to fear that the birds might get out of the township before we reached here. Did she ever run with you that way?"

"Well—yes—once or twice. She's got a great head of her own. Better keep a tight rein on her. Git down."

With wide detours, in a gentle lope, old Pont was throwing himself across the stubble-fields, back and forth, back and forth, his nose aloft in the mere tilt of motion like a rocking boat. Back and forth, from left to right, from right to left, against the gentle breeze, past the meadow, through the millet patch, now creeping here to trail, now rearing high there to reach above the weeds to "wind," went the old dog at his "work." Sometimes in ragweed stretches he could not be seen, but was located only by the shaking weeds or by the drab cloud which the wings of the flying grasshoppers

made above him. At last he slowed a little, and began to walk and sniff audibly upon a little tongue of old meadow that ran further on yet. He lifted his nose here and, snorting the weed-pollen out, put it down again into another depression in the grass.

"The old dog is slowing up," said Arthur.
"Guess he's tired."

"Yes," said the boy simply, in answer to the sound of Linton's voice, not to his words. "Been sumpthin' walkin' through the wool-grass since I was erlong here this mornin' ;" and he traced with his toe a little path as if you had drawn your closed fist along the ground.

"Look at the dog, McBride! Why doesn't he go on, you reckon? He's running round and round — and now he's stopped."

Pont was standing with one foot lifted and his nose held high, and in his eyes was a far-away gaze beyond the fence, as if over there was all that a dog could ever hope. It seemed as if his very soul were lifted.

"They're over there," said Shan, pointing toward the pasture with his gun.

"And can he see them?" asked the engineer.
"Nuh — don't talk ser much."

And, as they crept up to the fence that lay between the fields and the "back-pasture forty," the dog zigzagged a little this way and that, and, in a low crouch, became as rigid as a statue, with a fixed stare directly through the rails.

"Hold, Pont. Git over easy, Linton, and cock your gun. Hold, Pont! Steady! Now wait er moment 'till I git over. Don't move. Steady, Pont."

Like a cat creeping on its prey, the boy scaled the tall fence without a sound.

"Been here, sure," he whispered. "See that waller and that feather in ther dust."

He turned and motioned to the stiffened dog a time or two before he could induce him to move.

Presently Pont sprang to a large opening beneath the lower rider, but hung there like a cat, and wrinkling his nose a little this way and that, took a set gaze down almost at Linton's feet.

"Why, what's the matter with the dog, Shan? Is he fast? Why, the hole is large, and — "

"Flooo-oo-oo-oo-oop!"

"Shoot, man!" shouted the boy, and instantly there was an explosion and a fence stake over

Shan's head flew into splinters, but the bird went on in another direction, till a shot from the boy dropped it far out in the grass.

"Slip in another shell," said Shan, "and turn around a little," as he glanced up at the stake. "Come, Pont."

The dog struck the ground in a crouching point again—moved up a few feet, and lay down with his tongue out, but otherwise rigid.

"Is—is your dog sick?" asked Linton in an undertone, looking alarmingly at Shan.

"Yes, got a bird-fit. Look that way and scuffle your feet a little."

"Whir-r-r-r-up!"

"Don't hurry—now take him!"

But in spite of pains the engineer missed again, and the boy's right again brought down the bird, and his left caught another close in, while a third got away.

In an instant Shan had his shells in and stood as rigid as the pointer in the expectation of what was sure to come. When Pont lay down, his master knew that meant many birds. He simply clucked to the dog, who moved cautiously up as if he were stepping on

thorns, and then two birds more were up and down again almost at the boy's feet. Then they began to straggle up all round, too fast for courtesy, and Shan dropped them right and left, over him and behind him; for Linton, after another miss, came rushing up excitedly and thrust his loaded gun into Shan's hands and took the empty one and loaded it, and exchanged again and again till all the birds were gone.

Quickly the dog sprang in, for his keen nose had told him that all were flushed.

"I'll bring in the birds, anyway," said Linton, "if I can't—"

"But what's the dog fer?" said Shan.

And he went back and glanced up ruefully at the fence stake (for it was the one he had pitted against old Sal's roguish ways in the spring) while the dog piled the dead grouse at his feet.

"Some got away," said Linton, "and—"

"Some didn't," said Shan, curtly. "Where'd they go?"

"That way," said Linton, nodding.

"Yes, but where?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was watching you

shoot. Prettiest thing I ever saw. Seemed to rain birds for a while. How did you learn how?"

"By keepin' at it and shootin' at the birds only," replied the boy, glancing at the stake again.

"Why, man, I'd rather be able to do that as you do it than to bridge Niagara."

"Come on, then," said the boy, leading off.
"Hie on, Pont!"

Back and forth, right and left, went the old dog again, with lolling tongue now, and the slabber rolling from his mouth in the hot August sun. This way and that, that easy rocking gallop—that broad deep muzzle seeking the faintest breeze. Once he stopped dead still—moved cautiously up, and a little brown, streaked swamp-sparrow flew out of a tuft of grass.

Shan called it a "stinkbird," with a hunter's contempt for anything not game that balks his dog.

Again, a meadow-lark had walked across the route, and Pont turned a moment on the false trail, till it fluttered up with a scolding twitter, flirting its tail and wings in a jerky flight.

With a disgusted look the dog again began his windward search, and then anon he shut

his mouth with a snap and swallowed his saliva with a gulp. Further on, he came down to a trot directly forward—the nose held high—then a walk, the head dropped a little—then the shoulder-blades began to show above the back, the tail ceased to wag, and there was a low cunning cat-like, muscular sneak with the breast sweeping the grass.

Suddenly the dog turned his head almost back, till he crouched and stood in a half-moon, cataleptic in a backward point. With his nose full of others further on, he had almost passed a bird.

"Keep cool now and take this one when he gets up," said Shan. "I'll kick him out fer you. Now. *Now!* Why, what's ther matter?" (Bang! from his own gun.)

"Oh, you didn't have your gun cocked. Well, no, that gun's not a self-cocker. The locks only rebound half-way."

"I'd like to see you miss once," said Linton, laughing. "Can you do it?"

"Wait till we get ter shootin' quails in the brush. On, Pont."

Further on Linton shot in with Shan, and the boy swore that the bird was the engineer's. He

knew it was. He "wasn't holdin' on," and the pleased expression in Linton's face paid him well for his white lie — and made him resolve never to tell him about the stake.

"We can't go over there," said Shan. "Old Jones would die; but he'd swear first that we shot a cow apiece. They don't like us and won't let me shoot on their place, but I've seen him and the boys over on our place drivin' the game over cross the line so's they could shoot 'em on their own land with er good conscience. Er man's conscience is er funny thing, ain't it? But wait, we'll get 'em. Let's go to the pond and rest. Pont's got ter have er bath and er drink."

But while Shan rested on the grass and Pont lay in the water, Linton crept down the swale to the "mad lane" of double fences between the "McBrides and Joneses," and found what he had been hunting for, some primitive prairie flowers preserved from hoof and share between the double fences. Here were yet the splendors of the virgin prairie, and he thanked his stars that something good of peace and preservation should come out of this glaring evil.

Back once in a middle western state he

noticed that a certain railroad had put in double cattle-guards between *all* the farms, whether there was a lane there or not—a shameful public commentary upon the instability of human friendships. He wondered if the C. and D. had better not adopt this plan, when it fenced its right-of-way.

Then he recalled how in the fenced right-of-ways he had seen some of the strange wild-flowers abloom in the early spring as he came out,—the creamy indigo plant, the "shooting star" or American cowslip, the pretty spider-worts and many other beauties, now long since almost extinct upon the pastured prairies. It was a queer grip that the untrodden past had here upon the very progressive present.

He strolled back and found the boy asleep in the shade, and Pont, refreshed, lying near him. The shadows were getting very long now. Linton awoke Shan and asked him where that strange weird bird note was, which he heard somewhere, he could not tell just where.

"Can you tell how far away it is, McBride?"

"No, but I know what it is and where it will be," he said. "It is the young prairie chickens runnin' back."

"Back where?"

"Back to where we first found 'em. We'll go by there after a while, when they git gethered up, and git some more of 'em."

He lay back again. The dog pricked his ears at the calls, and Linton listened.

"Why, McBride, that's musical, listen! Talk about there being no syrinx in the birds below the perchers. I don't care if that grouse hasn't four pairs of song muscles, as the bird men say, there is melody and almost tears too in that plaintive homesick whistle. We killed the mother, too, didn't we? And there are those innocent orphans running back to that place of slaughter."

He listened longer while the boy dozed. The plaintive whistles softened all the hunter out of him. He shook the sleeper, and said:—

"Say, Shan, let's leave them alone. I don't want to kill any more. You've done well and we've got enough. I haven't the heart to risk even one of my shots among them. Listen as they get closer together! Why, there are wails and sobs, and broken-hearted love, and home desecrated, in that orphan cry. Let's go home."

And they arose and walked to the house, calling Pont off of many a trail and scent as they passed near the rendezvous of the grouse.

What a different mood was now upon the boy. As the hunter, he had been down among his savage ancestors in his manner. But now he came back to civilization, was glad and joyous, and made Linton stay to supper with him to enjoy the broiled birds.

When the engineer went home, Shan made him take some birds with him as his share of the hunt. The boy felt well toward him, as we all do for the man that lets us outshoot him and yet praises our skill.

"Won't — won't you send one specially to Miss Dolly?" said Linton, as he started off.

"Why, yes, I reckon," said Shan, "if you don't want 'em all ter give her yourself."

"Well, I'm selfish enough to accept the birds you shot, but I'm not quite up to that. What shall I say?"

"Oh, you kin do ther talkin' — "

"Since you've done the shooting?"

"No, but fix it up ter suit yerself. You talk well enough, I mean."

"Yes, a plagued sight better than I shoot," said Linton, as he rode off.

Shan stood a few minutes looking after him, then turned into the house, feeling that he would give his gun, his skill, and — and — almost Pont, if he could use his tongue as well as the engineer used his.

CHAPTER XXX

"And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes."

— WORDSWORTH.

"How nature paints her colors, how the bee
Sits on the bloom extracting liquid sweets."

— MILTON.

"YOUR plant is a cultivated *Martynia*, Miss Dolly," said Linton, some mornings after their flower talk. "You may call it a 'mousetail' or a 'unicorn plant,' according as you consider the beak of the fruit a tail or a horn. They are often grown in the garden for pickles, but this one is grown for beauty. Say," he continued in another strain, "I am going to spend the day at Coon Creek bridge. Would you and your friend, Miss Mildred, like to join me for a day among the flowers?"

"Why, yes, if she can go. I'll go over after breakfast and see."

She came back flushed with the news that Mildred and little Sam would go; and she began to prepare a lunch.

This was not the first time these girls had been out with Linton among the flowers. He had bought for each of them a book on botany, and had taught them how to "analyze" the simpler blossoms about them. So interesting and considerate was he that the girls were delighted when they could get him to talk flowers; and under the effects of his thought and pure diction they were checking themselves into the dignity of better speech and better modes of reasoning.

After they had spent the forenoon in specimen-hunting, they came to the bridge and ate their lunch, with the water from the workmen's tank.

Later, Linton was turning over a specimen of the partridge-pea and wondering which way it was developing — whether up from the regular, or down from the irregular flowers of the podded order. While it was of the same species, this specimen here differed in many ways from those he knew east and south.

"I thought you had identified that," said Mildred. "What do you find about it to gaze at so long?"

"It is a sort of connecting link," he said, not

lowering his glass, "one of those flowers between two forms,—not either, but akin to both."

Then he mentioned that there was a great deal about flowers that was interesting besides their beauty and their names. "You recall our study of the *Martynia* a few evenings ago, Miss Dolly?"

"Oh, yes, Millie, he means 'micetails' or 'mousetails.' I don't know how you make the plural. But you should uh heard him. Oh, the most interesting things about how the flower paints its — its — its —"

"Lips and cheeks," said Linton, "like a girl."

"To catch the passing — uh — ah —" she stammered.

"Bee or beau —" he added again.

"Oh, you mean thing, hush! Go on and tell us more about it."

"Which shall I do? Go on or hush?"

"Why, hush about girls and go on about flowers. You know."

"That is a little hard to do under the circumstances. Flowers are a great deal like the rest of us — especially girls. I sometimes feel that I should like to write a book and call it, 'The

Whole World Kin'—not by 'one touch of Nature,' but by many."

"I've often thought of flowers as loving," said Mildred—"or as pining away for want of love."

"There is more in your thought than you may realize. If they do not feel the emotion of love, they do certainly woo in the most ingenious and delicate ways. Except in the endowment of speech and music, man has scarcely surpassed the flowers in this. But all their wooing has been toward a messenger to carry their love-gifts. And they have been a long time at it too—some of them—and are now adepts at the art. Long before any balloon had soared, they had wafted greetings upon the winds; before any savage paddled, they had let slip little love-boats richly freighted; long before Noah loosed the dove, they had used the birds as letter-carriers, and I should not be surprised to hear some day that some flower had hitched a love-message, not a seed, to one of the quadrupeds."

"But why should they want to do this?" said Dolly.

"It's a long story," said Linton.

"And a long afternoon, unless you make it interesting," she replied.

As he spoke confidently on his cranky topic, of the evolution of flowers in keeping with their needs for cross-fertilization and the like, Dolly exclaimed skeptically:—

“But how do you *know* these things, Mr. Linton?”

“Oh, I don’t know them any more than I know you were once a baby. They are strong inferences. Thus from the leaves of a plant we can infer much of its history. A nasturtium leaf always suggests an aquatic ancestry. There was probably a time when all plants were simply leaves — just as all men were once babes. The halves of the kernels of seeds now are mere leaves, as in the acorn. These are the baby oak’s nursing-bottles which sustain it till it can secure food for itself. The beans bring theirs up out of the ground with them, and suck at them long after the stalks can stand alone.”

“Mr. Linton,” said Mildred, “I assure you Dolly was a baby once — a little beauty — and she appreciates your illustration, because she was raised on the bottle and used it after she ran about.”

“Mildred!!! Hush!!!”

"Never mind, Miss Dolly. I like to think of us all as babes. While in one respect they are little savages, in another they seem to typify a time in our development when we passed a stage not only of innocence but of grace as well. I never see a little child wave its hand, or hear it inflect its voice, that I do not feel that this argues—as the plant's leaf hints its origin—that man (and woman too) must once have been both graceful and musical by nature and not by education. Sometimes, when I compare the grace, elocution, and music of the grown persons of to-day with that which children often exhibit, I feel that man has surely fallen somewhere, and I sigh for degeneration again to that pristine state. I—"

"Ain't that a little two-edged," said Dolly, bridling with a sort of pout, "since you have heard me recite and sing, and never saw me as a baby?"

"Oh, Miss Dolly, pardon me! I forgot! I was not thinking of you at all. In my excitement that night, I recall you only as a—as a—a—"'

"Clinger?" said Mildred.

Linton and Dolly both looked terrible things

at her a moment, for this cut both ways also: but shortly they broke into a laugh. He arose and went to watch the laying of the capstone of a pier, and Dolly pinched Mildred and swore, as a woman swears, that she would be even with her yet.

On his return he explained the probable origin and the structure of the flower, and the origin of sex as an effort also, on the part of the plants, to get out of self. Suddenly Dolly broke in:—

“Mr. Linton, do you think the first woman was made out of a man’s rib?”

“No. There were doubtless women before that day in Eden. ‘Male and female created He them.’”

“Then what makes the Bible say so?” she said petulantly.

“It puts it as the beautiful figure of the pretty and close relation that woman was now to sustain to her husband. In the irresponsible and animal condition before this, sex in the human race had been in the mire with that of the other animals, but now, with the incoming of the spiritual nature, it was lifted into a new realm. It was a spiritual step out of self.

This was the account of the creation not of the first woman, but of the first wife."

"But—but, Mr. Linton. Is—"

"Now, this is a flower talk," interrupted Linton—not knowing his beyond.

"But—" said Dolly.

But he was off again.

He casually mentioned the probable origin of honey, emphasizing how closely related chemically were woody fibre and one form of sugar.

"A great chemist is reported as saying," he continued, "that he could make enough sugar out of his shirt to sweeten his cup of coffee."

"Well, he could drink it, then," said Dolly, her lip curling in disgust.

"Yes," said Mildred, "as Shan says, no such feller could sweeten my coffee for me. He's always sayin' that a certain girl with 'platted' hair can sweeten his coffee for him all her life," she added, as she stole a suggestive glance at Dolly.

The latter simply looked down, pulled a grass-stalk, bit off its end and spat it out. Linton was puzzled as he turned his head quickly from one to the other, but there was a queer, glad look in his face as he saw Dolly's

eyes averted and Mildred's dancing so mischievously.

"Well, ladies, I wasn't that great chemist, I'm glad to say," said he, breaking a rather embarrassing silence. "All I was trying to impress was that beauty and sweetness came down the ages together."

"But, Mr. Linton, how can you ever *feel* such things?" said Dolly, yet skeptical.

A little dog had been barking some minutes in the woods over across the creek. Just then a gun went off over that way.

"What is the man shooting at there *now?*" said Linton, starting at the sound.

"A squirrel," said Dolly, as though there could be no doubt about it.

"How do you know?" he said.

"Nothin' else there now to shoot," she said.

"Maybe it was a quail," he suggested.

She laughed. "Did that bark sound like a bird-dog?" she asked.

"No," he said, recalling Pont's silence, "but —"

"Well, he was barkin' up a tree," she continued confidently. "Anybody could tell that."

"Well, I couldn't," he said.

"Maybe you don't know much about dogs," she almost sneered.

"I do not."

"The squirrel was runnin' on a limb — perhaps jumpin' from tree to tree. Oh, I've been out squirrel-huntin' with my brother Henry," she added, as she saw a sort of answering sneer on his face.

"Indeed? Maybe you know whether or not the man killed the squirrel?" he queried, with a good-natured taunt. "Heard the shot hit him, perhaps?"

"Yes. I feel sure that he killed it."

"Why? How?"

"He didn't shoot again."

"But it might have escaped — run into a hole, perhaps."

"Then the dog would still bark for a while," she said firmly.

They looked at each other a few moments with mischievous defiance in their eyes, when shortly a lank, "one-gallused" boy came around from behind a clump of willows on the other side of the creek; he was followed by a panting, half-shepherd, half-rat-terrier dog; a muzzle-loading, double-barrelled shot-gun was on his

shoulder; swinging by the tail in his left hand was the limp form of a fox squirrel.

"Unh! hunh!" said Dolly, with a flash of triumph. "Look there!"

But Linton had a cool, sly expression on his face. "It may be," he said, "there are folks who know flowers and butterflies as you know dogs, squirrels, and boys!"

Dolly gave a little gasp as she saw his trap, and looked as though she could shake him.

"When you two get tired of slippin' on each other's slickness," said Mildred, "I'd like to hear some more about the flowers."

He incidentally mentioned that all flowers were not cross-fertilized, that many that once were evidently so are not so now, and some of these—such as the grasses, which were among the giants once—had lost color, shape, and some parts, as petals, by degenerating.

"This June grass here—" he began.

"We call that 'blue-grass,' Mr. Linton," said Mildred. "It came with many of our forefathers from Kentucky, and is a part of our pedigree. Blue-grass and blue blood have much the same origin in this region, and is much revered unless you come from Virginia. Then

you tramp both under your feet and say
‘Thar!’”

“I beg pardon,” said Linton. “I knew ‘all flesh was grass,’ of course, and all blood, too; but I had never seen just that application of the fact before. Isn’t it time to go home now? There are dozens of interesting things yet, but —”

“Are any of these changes going on now?” said Dolly.

“Only a few, perhaps, and these solely within species. So permanent have become the habits and environment of plants now that, however much they vary, there is little change. It is the same with animals. Only mind and spirit are moving rapidly onward now.”

“You seem to get much pleasure out of your theories, Mr. Linton,” said Mildred. “To you many wayside weeds have a story which I suppose you can read almost as you run, and —”

“But not as the filly runs,” said Dolly, slyly.

“Well, scarcely.”

“But what if your theories should not be true?” continued Mildred.

“Then, as fancies only they are delightful, and are as entertaining as yours when you say

the bluebell weeps, the daisy smiles, and so on. And there is also a much greater variety of my fancies, if I allow them such. Again, with mine I can prophesy, while with yours you can only dream dreams."

They arose to go.

CHAPTER XXXI

“Science sees signs; poetry the thing signified.” — HARE.

“ . . . and faith became
A passionate intuition.” — WORDSWORTH.

“The lie was dead
And damned, and truth stood up instead.” — BROWNING.

THEY walked home chatting lightly of various things. Dolly and Linton had left Mildred at the gate and were crossing a little wood between the fields.

She had thrown her hat back upon her shoulders and was holding it by the long strings of ribbon hanging down — a fashion then prevailing. Linton turned to admire the pretty face, when he found it so serious that it surprised him. The taunt was all out of it now.

“Mr. Linton,” she said soberly, “you spoke of flowers deceiving, coquetting, advertising, and painting things they didn’t have, concealing, and so on, do — do you think it wrong to deceive when you have a *good* motive or purpose in it? Wait a moment. I passed by this spot last

April, and a mother woodcock fibbed to me right here about her health — said, in her way, that she was sick or wounded, and she wanted me to try to catch her, I guess, so that I would not see her eggs. I liked her for it. Was that wrong?"

"Which, the fibbing or the liking?"

"Why, kinder both, you know. Of course the bird did not know better, but — but, Mr. Linton, if these things seem to run so in nature — in the very plants and things, is — is it very wrong in us, you think?"

"How about the shrike, which is said to imitate his victim's call, that he may devour it; or the pitcher-plant, for instance, that makes its nectar poisonous that it may kill flies and consume them?"

"Oh, but I said 'for a *good* purpose.'"

"Whose good purpose, for the plants or the flies?"

"Why, kinder both again, I reckon, but finally for the flies."

"I think God cannot but hate a liar," he said, not knowing anything else just then.

"Then what does he allow the flowers and birds to tell 'em for?" she said with a snap.

He hesitated — puzzled for a reply suited to her.

"A lie may be as much an element of mere vegetable and animal progress as a truth. It rises out of the condition of ignorance of the deceived. The hare does not know that the greyhound is dashing so rapidly at him till it is too late, or that the cat's slow creep is motion at all. What I mean is that the lie of nature is as much the fault of ignorance as of cunning or deceit. But when it comes to man, where there is responsibility, any lie becomes a *conscious* wrong, and conscious wrong is the only wrong."

"But — but God doesn't tell us all of the truth," she said.

"That is another question. What I was going to say is that *character* cannot be built with lies. Character is the result of the breaking down of selfishness and the lie must go with — "

"But I didn't feel that I was doing wrong — I — "

"Oho! So this is a personal matter, is it?" he said, glad to get the questioning tables turned.

"I haven't been telling fibs," she blushed. "But, Mr. Linton, ain't misfortunes sometimes

sent us that we may be happier when they are past? Miss Winnie used to tell us so. Don't the Bible teach this somewhere? Yes? Then couldn't I — a body, I mean — bring misfortune — no, unhappiness, I mean — a little, that some one else could be happier after a while?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because your human judgment is too frail. Who are you that you should dare the devilish business of tantalizing, or, if you fancy the motive good, should try the pleasure of playing God, — as if it were a game at dolls?"

She shrank under his severe words and kept her face away from him awhile.

"Say," he continued, in a few minutes, "do you know that you impress me as if you were trying to justify a case of flirting?"

She only looked at him and laughed a little foolishly. The engineer was puzzled again. Later on, as they were crossing the deeply cut, narrow sheep-paths, she burst out:—

"Mr. Linton, didn't God make man first?" as the Bible says.

"Yes and no, both," he replied. "Rationally and spiritually there is no doubt that man is

the older. Science and revelation agree on this. But physically and sexually he is not.

"What I mean," he answered to her wondering look, "is that the mother is the older parent, and —"

"I've always felt," she said wistfully, "that if ever I had a husband I should like him to be older and wiser than me, and — and — that this had been founded in — in — the necessity of things, — that — that — it was a fate which I could not resist, — a sort of compulsion."

Linton felt a little frightened. Was this girl almost proposing to him? Her face did not look like that. It was innocent and had a far-away sort of interest in it.

"In all that shall make him your husband," he said solemnly, "any man that is a man is this." There was quite a pause.

"We feel sure that at first things only divided," he began again, "brother just separated from brother, or rather, I should say, sister separated from sister. They began to bud from each other, and later there was one form from which perhaps all the others budded — and that was the mother. Lastly there was the father — the great step out of self. But all this was long

before man's time. Man, however, since the dawn of the human, has developed faster than woman. His wars with his fellows, his struggles with beasts, more rapidly provoked his mental exercise and growth. He may have stood, for a short time, spiritually alone with God while woman beat upon the farther gate of Eden; but when once admitted she peeped out first through the bars into the great Beyond, and into the greater depths of spirituality is peeping yet. Each of the two great resurrections were first announced to woman."

He saw a new light flash into her face—a something that he could almost worship, and he listened for its message.

"Then God *did* create things once without a father?" she said quickly, with a hidden face.

"Yes."

"You won't think me immodest, Mr. Linton?" She turned her face full up to him now. "I do so much want to know. Who else am I to ask? I don't think any one can tell 'less it's you."

She hesitated a moment.

"You told us how Nature went back sometimes and did things in the old way, didn't you, as in the grasses?"

"Yes, she does that suddenly sometimes yet — goes backward almost in a leap. It is called reversion to —"

"Then if God creates that way *yet* sometimes, it's — it's not such an awful miracle that we should *not* be able to believe it, is it, that He could have created Jesus without an earthly father; is it, Mr. Linton? . . . Is it?"

The expectancy in her face was something reverent to the engineer.

"No," he said solemnly. "Tell me why you wanted to know this, little girl." And tenderly he reached out and put a hand upon her hair, as if she were a child.

"Because," she said, "my father says he always stumbles at this miracle — as almost something beyond God."

"And so have I often — often — often — always — un—until now," he said, with a moisture in his eyes and a dryness in his voice.

She flashed a happy look at him for an instant, and ran through the wood-pile gate into the kitchen.

And while he had felt that he was soaring so far above her, a little child had led him by the hand!

CHAPTER XXXII

“It was autumn, and incessant
Piped the quails from shocks and sheaves,
And, like living coals the apples
Burned among the withering leaves.”

— LONGFELLOW.

“Ah! what a warning to a thoughtless man, could any spot of earth render back an echo of the sad steps by which it hath been trod.” — WORDSWORTH.

“The body is the first proselyte the soul makes.” — THOREAU.

LATE September, browning from the recent summer drought and the early autumn frosts — sere in the fields with ripened corn, but bright along the lanes with white-faced asters and the nodding golden-rod — the orchards glorious in the red splendor of the jenneting and Ben Davis apple.

Here and there the shocks of maize narrowed the perspective of the quarter sections, and the sharp sword-like stubbles stuck up as if this bit of earth were on the defensive against further molestation.

Shan thought, as he heaped the cut stalks of

corn into shocks, that a piece of ground seemed much larger when gauged by a corn-knife than when measured by a riding-plough or even a walking-cultivator. And then he thought of that other gauging yet—with the shucking-peg—the slow halting at shock and shock. Then the later vista came of gathering the feed in from the frozen earth with the heavy jolting swell of the wagon-box as it rose and fell, like a surf boat, over the billows of dirt which the “diamond” plough had heaped up. He could almost hear the lowing cattle and see the strewn fodder over the snowy feed-lot.

He had cut his twenty shocks this cool invigorating morning—“sixteen hills square,” and stood holding yet, as a wrestler holds his rival upon his thigh, a great bundle of stalks. He stopped to listen.

“Do you hear that, Pont? The quails are walking, sure as you live, old boy; goin’ to thuh river-bottom. We must get a few of ‘em as they pass.”

He set up the last load against the shock, twisted the tips of two stalks together, and tied them around the top of the great, standing sheaf. Then he stooped, and with his corn-

knife split, at a stroke, a stray watermelon that had grown by accident among the pumpkins in the corn. Frigid with the last night's frost, it was as refreshing in the midday sun as an iced drink.

He started early on his hunt that afternoon, wiping the long silken gossamers from the fence stakes as he climbed from farm to farm. He was led on by flock after flock getting up and flying further on as he sought the stragglers of the last one here and there. He had not bagged many birds; the thick brush and high-standing corn, along with his small practice yet this season, caused him to miss much.

Almost before he realized it, he found himself near the Simpson home, and his poor shooting reminded him of his implied promise to Linton, that he would show him how he could miss quails in the woods. Shan had heard that the engineer was going away soon, now that the railroad work was nearly done.

There was something in the rejuvenescent warmth of the sunny afternoon which so frequently follows a frosty night that made a little spring again of the half-day. The robin and the redbird had broken anew into sudden song,

and the bluebird sat silent on the fences and the dead trees, and had ceased his pessimistic call so prevalent in the morning. All this warmed again the boy's heart into love — love almost without an object — he thought; just the young heart hungering after that great ideal heart which we all in youth feel is floating somewhere, waiting for our own. Almost before he awoke from his love-dream, Dolly stood before him, answering his front-door knock.

"Is — is Mr. Linton in?" he asked.

Somehow he conceived of him as always in. He could not understand how he could be anywhere else.

"No," said Dolly, "he's out at the cut, busy, I think. Won't you come in?"

"No, thank you. Just wanted to see *him* er minit. Thought maybe he might want ter take er little hunt. I'll go by and see him."

"Henry's in the east field," she said.

Henry and he had sometimes met out and hunted together.

"I'll not bother him this evening. I only had er sort of engagement with Mr. Linton."

Lord! how pretty she was, he thought, as she pleaded these little things to detain him.

"You don't come to see Henry any more. You seem to be very much taken with Mr. Linton of late."

"No more'n some other folks, I reckon," he said, almost savagely.

The girl started and blanched.

"When did you hear from Miss Winnie?" she said, almost with his own savageness.

"I haven't heard at all. Have you heard?"

"Yes, she wrote *to* me but *about* you, mostly."

His face lighted at this. Hers did not, but he was looking toward the east field now, not knowing how to get away gracefully.

"Henry is not at home much these days except in working hours," he said, merely to be saying something.

"No, he's rather social. Don't stay at home all the time."

She reached a little for the swinging door and laid her pretty face against its edge, till he could see only one-half of it, almost smiling mischievously. He looked at it a moment as though he were trying to divine what the eye and dimple behind the shutter were doing.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by."

And as she took her face away, there was a white line beside her nose, and beyond that the blood had dammed itself up into a great, unconscious blush.

My! my! how his heart recalled the thrill that he felt that night when he had held her in his arms a minute!

But his head, remembering the June meeting and the white stripe now down her face, reached down and wagged his tongue.

"Two of her, too, I reckon," he muttered, as he stepped over the backyard fence.

He did not know of Linton's praise of his manly courtesy, and that his smooth words had piled all the grouse at her feet as the gift of "the best wing-shot I ever saw, and the manliest fellow."

He did not go by for Linton. His heart had hardened toward him as it had again softened toward the girl. A flock of quails flushed before him in the bare lot, for it was that season when quails were anywhere—and they flew far up on the ridge. Dolly, looking after him, saw him climbing with a hunter's eager stride.

As he left the woods late that afternoon and came near home, he scared up, just at dark, another flock of quails at a spot where they had evidently intended to spend the night. They flew in every direction, for he had almost stepped upon them. It was no use to seek them, for it was now too dark to shoot.

Just then he missed an old glove, which the briars had pulled from the pocket of his working-jacket. He would need it to-morrow, cutting corn. So he went back a little way on his own trail, called Pont in, put on the remaining glove, and stretched both hands down to the dog and said, "Lost." The dog gazed at him a moment, at the bare hand, and darted off. Shan walked a little further back, but soon met Pont with the missing glove — proud of doing over again a trick he began in his puppyhood.

As he started home again Shan was surprised to scare a second time the two parent birds from the same spot, where they had returned and given the signal to their young to reassemble, since the danger was now gone, as they thought. They flew over into a field, fall ploughed for wheat. The boy stood a moment. In answer to their parent's whistled "whoo-eé

whoo-eé," the young, but grown-up, children were running in, crying to each other now in a high treble, like the parental piping.

The old birds were now in a predicament that was pitiable, even to a hunter's ear. They had summoned their young to an assembling-place that was again terribly dangerous. They could hear the children's answering obedient call, and yet if they, the parents, cried again, again the enemy would know the new place of meeting.

Shan wondered how they would solve the problem. He stood still and whispered to the dog to "down!" At his feet the little quails chirped and twittered in the gloom, and the dog, with quivering chops, pointed this way and that, as he crouched. Over in that ploughed field there suddenly began to sound the queerest, weirdest, most ventriloquial little wails and twitters the boy had ever heard; and the children's "whoo-eé"-cry ceased at once when they heard it. Shan coughed, and all was silence everywhere. Shortly, from over in the ploughed field there came one—just one—slow, deep "whee-oo whoò"—the last syllable low-pitched and descending—and then there was a sup-

pressed rustle at his feet, as if a snake were gliding softly over the dead leaves; and for a minute or so all was silence—save the jarring of the dog's chops and the valvular snuffle of his excited nostrils. A little later over among the clods he heard plainly many happy "cheaps" and chatters—the rejoicings of a reunited family.

As Shan walked on home he felt strongly the pathos of this little incident, under the influence of his softening toward Dolly again and of Linton's pathetic appeal for the grouse, which he had not forgotten. He put his hand upon his game-sack, and, as he felt the dead forms therein, he wondered at the many homes made unhappy by his afternoon's sport, for he had flushed many flocks. He recalled sadly how he had taken a bird here, and one or two there, from different families.

He felt now that he had violated the sanctity of the affections; for this brotherly and parental love among the birds was something to be admired in human hearts—nay, almost revered. Here he had been beginning to hate Linton for coming into his circle, and thwarting his plans and hopes, but the engineer's conduct was

blameless and unintentional, and he was to some extent the victim of opportunity ; but he himself had hunted up and persecuted these things that loved and dared for love. And for the moment he felt that his remorse was virtue.

Just then, in the dusk, a screech-owl hurled itself across a bit of sky above him, and from his hip his hands shot it. He did not know what it was when he fired. It was the mere mechanical impulse of habit. He did not feel so much compunction about the owl, because of his recent experience with the species, but his conscience smote him, that in such a mood of heart and head, his hands should have behaved so badly.

He felt and found his left barrel cocked yet, and the thought came that, while he was pitying those quails, if one of them had flashed between him and the twilight in the west, he would have slain it. His virtue, after all, was but a necessity.

"Opportunity not only makes ther thief," he mused, "it makes the rest of us—it and practice. And what if a feller's practice is on the wrong side. Before he knows it, 'Bang !' and the wrong is done."

He walked slowly on awhile. "Uh feller

can't control his opportunities, but he can his practice. Why, he just orter go around aimin' at everything good till he shoots at a good thing, so ter speak, as I did at ther owl, before ther devil's got time to hinder him. Why, er hypocrite might do good then before he could help himself — make er snapshot Godward! Guess he often does."

He met an aged spinstress of the region. He bowed low in his mellow mood and took off his hat gallantly, and his heart glowed at the pleasant smile in return. It had never occurred to him that such a face could look so kindly.

"That's about all there is in politeness, I reckon. Well, that's enough. Er feller sees a skirt or feather, and lifts his hat and bows as if he's worshippin', and some hungry heart beneath a homely face is happy, 'cause his hand and spine were trained well early. But God deliver us from practisin' in the wrong way—and er opportunity. All that saved some of them quails wuz the darkness.

"I reckon," he said, as later he let Pont through the lot-gate, "God keeps many of us good because He never gives us ther chance er bein' our meanest."

CHAPTER XXXIII

"When two do the same thing, it is not the same thing after all." — PUBLILIUS SYRUS.

"When the fight begins with himself, the man is worth something." — BROWNING.

"Sometimes I feel so cheap that I could write a poem about it, but straightway I cannot for I am no longer mean." — THOREAU.

LINTON had been "breaking" the sorrel filly to the buggy. She went well, but at times was a little hard-mouthed and made her old dashes for favorite turnings, especially if these led toward her old home. One afternoon, early after dinner, he drove over to Mr. McBride's to see Shan and thank him for his coming by for him a few days previous.

"I'm sorry that I couldn't see you miss a little," he said jokingly.

But Shan was not responsive to the engineer's mood.

"You couldn't go out again this afternoon?" the latter inquired.

"No," said Shan, "we are out of flour. I've got ter go ter town."

"I'm sorry. I've only a few more days here. I shall not forget your kindness to me. But I hope I shall see you again before I start."

Shan's heart smote him, not so much that he could not go, but that he did not want to.

"Say," he said, "you take Pont along; he'll find some birds fer you."

"Why, I don't think he will follow me," said Linton.

"Wait till I git my gun. You take that and he'll ride with you."

When he came back from the house and handed up the gun to the engineer, holding the champing filly in, Linton said:—

"This is very kind of you, McBride. I would not accept all these favors now, for I would wait till another day when you could go, but Dolly is ill and I'd like to get a bird for her."

Shan's heart fell and he turned away his face, but Pont leaped into the buggy.

"Watch that filly," the boy said, because he must say something. "She's got the devil in her and is as uncertain—as—as er woman."

And Linton remembered again as he drove along how much fierceness, almost viciousness,

this big-hearted boy had put into that comparison. He wondered if Miss Hudson had not failed to write to Shan this week. He guessed that that was the kind of flour he needed; he was going to town, doubtless, hoping to get a letter. Then he fancied Winnie Hudson, in her far northern home, writing out her heart to this Missouri stripling, while he, her old first love—madly worshipping her yet, was dawdling the summer away teaching a sweet Missouri lass to know a pistil from a stamen. Oh, there was a terrible unfitness somewhere! Would it ever work out right?

Sad in his mood, he put the filly up, and went in and felt Dolly's pulse almost professionally. He had that tender, bedside touch which makes some persons ministering angels to the suffering. Round and round the house Pont bounded, whining, for fear the hunter would steal out some back door and go off without him.

A little later he started. Some boys had fortunately flushed some birds over on the crest before he came out; so now he knew where to find some.

The walk, to him, was delightful. The air was bracing, the woods were coloring rapidly,

and enough of haze stood on the hills and far-away swells to hint of Indian summer, that entrancing season when the year, like a dying saint, seems to catch upon its face the hue of heaven.

Here as he walked the young meadow-larks arose and flew, flirting their white tail feathers jauntily to their fellows; and to the great circle that Pont felt he must take or die, some young flickers rose from the ant-hills on the sward, and displaying their white rump patches, flew into some near-by oaks. Linton could hear them rejoicing as if they thought they had escaped a great danger.

At last Pont began a sort of uncertain sneak upon a bunch of grass, stopped, wagged his tail, and with a half laugh, almost, in his face, looked back at Linton. He knew well enough that his master would tolerate no points on rabbits, but perhaps this kind-countenanced biped would. He would test the metal of this hunter.

Linton, too, crept near, and the dog, encouraged by this, came down to a rigid point. Peeping closer, the hunter saw the hare. It was a thrilling thing to him, this silent battle of cunning against cunning. The dog had paused in

the instinct of caution, and was crouched in the expectancy of a spring.

The man had come "head on" to the hare, with the wind toward the latter's nose, as the creature nearly always sits. It was shivering in nervous expectation. There was an occasional humping of the body, just the merest, to feel that the great hind legs were in trim; and the engineer could notice the opening and closing of the hare-lipped slit beneath the nose as the nostril-flaps were lifted to investigate him by scent. There was occasionally the faintest waving of an ear, set to listen backward and outward toward the dog, and the conspicuous eyes seemed closed sleepily to the merest slits.

How wonderfully his senses "boxed the compass," and how perfectly his fur blended with the grass! Nothing but a nose or an accident could discover him.

Linton could not resist the idea that he could catch him, but when his hand came down, it was upon a warm bare place, and a white tail was bobbing away out yonder over the sod.

"I don't wonder," he said to himself, "that the girl felt that she might be justified by Nature. The old dame is ahead of us yet in many

things. Here are these larks, flickers, and hares signalling automatically to their fellows as they flee, having left the motive of their altruism long ago behind. We incline or uncover our heads mechanically—facts that once meant reverence; we pass the commonplaces of small-talk glibly—things that once meant interest; and we grasp each other's hands thoughtlessly—an act that once meant help. But the shout and the whistle of youth, the significant wave of the hat and the bonnet, are gone. So much of altruism, like the hare's here, is a vestige. Mr. Wallace says he once led his family to the burrow by this white banner, but now he early deserts his young.

"But, listen! Ah, Nature's better influences are with us yet. Hear the quails. They are gathered in now—all but a straggler away down there under the falling hazels. He pipes a homesick cry and his fellows consciously answer him, though they risk their own safety. At least, they don't know that they don't," he added, smiling to himself at the prospect of his poor shooting.

Looking up, he saw Pont on a dead stand, and instantly his mood changed. Running to

him, he killed the flushing bird — how, he scarcely knew.

Almost before he realized it, another was up and down ; and fired with his success, he followed them up. Pleased at his skill he persecuted them, and though he missed many, he bagged nearly half a dozen — found another flock and got some from that.

As he started home he climbed a flat-topped, plank fence, and when he rested on it Pont sprang up beside him and rested there, too, an instant.

"Be still, Pont! As old dying Leather-stock-ing said, a hunter ought not to be ashamed of his dog — even if he climbs up to him in the high places. I declare, old fellow, as I shot and you retrieved, it must have seemed to a looker-on that there was a pair of us.

"I came out here with the best of intentions, so I thought — wanted a bird for a sick friend, and here I have killed a dozen, and found the old demon of savagery in me as I enjoyed it. My hands have led me where my head and heart would not have gone alone — my pleasure in my growing skill has smothered out my conscience. A man should watch the cunning of his hand."



They had started on, and Pont went again by the way of the hare's form, as if its odor were refreshing to him.

"Come in, Pont. Let the rabbit alone. He may not know the motive of his every movement, but he's got some pretty good company close around, I tell you. Come in, old boy, it takes a keen nose to find birds and hares. You've done well; and though you can smell a fellow many feet underground, it takes a keener sense still to find his motives.

"I wish you had it, Pont. I wish you could smell into this heart of mine and tell me by your point just what is hiding there. I don't believe I'm a hypocrite, but—" and he slid a hand over the dog's head.

As he went out he passed a thorny honeylocust tree, in which a shrike had impaled his surplus prey. He had thought that if the bird were there on his return, he would shoot the cruel monster. "Why does he kill more than he needs?" Now as he started homeward he passed within easy gunshot of the butcher, sitting among his shambles, but he let him live. Just then a quail in his game-sack began the flutter of its death-agony — not having been

shot dead. He took it out, beat its head across his gun, and put its limp form back into the sack. As he wiped the blood from the brown barrels he glanced up again at the stern aspect of the bird above him, and murmured, "Another pair of us, I reckon," and walked reflectively on.

"I've brought you a bird," he said to Dolly, later, as he took in a quail which, in his field-cooking experience, he had broiled with his own hand.

"Did *you* kill it?" she asked feverishly.

"Yes," he said rather proudly.

"Thank you. It was very kind."

But he thought, in some way, there was a little tone of disappointment in her voice.

CHAPTER XXXIV

“Sorrow and the scarlet leaf.” — PARSONS.

“Snipes and woodcocks also may afford rare sport; but I trust it would be nobler game to shoot one’s self.” — THOREAU.

“The body turning round the central soul makes a little circle in the sand.” — LE GALLIENNE.

DAY by day Shan grew more morose. After supper, when Linton took Pont and the gun home, the boy was civil—but merely civil.

“ Didn’t get any letter from Miss Hudson, I guess,” thought the engineer.

In a short while, Dolly was able to be up, and daily, as the shadows of the ridge crossed the swale and swept up the slope of the sheep-lot, the sorrel filly hauled her and Linton out upon the old ridge-road.

One afternoon, as Shan thought more and more upon his fate, and was more morose than ever, he took up his gun and whistled to his dog. He went over much the same ground of the other hunt, only he went further down; and, almost fearing to see the Simpson farm, he kept the ridge between him and it, and

crossed the railroad beyond the deep cut, near the bridge.

He had had poor luck, though his gun had gone off here and there.

He was too nervous to snap-shoot well, and too desperate to be deliberate. He felt, in some way, that if there were not a crisis in his affairs soon, he would make one.

At last, on the other side of the railroad, he had wandered up the ridge to a point near the highway, and looking out a little avenue in the bushes, he saw, without being seen, Linton and Dolly near by in the buggy, driving slowly out for their evening ride. Her face was pale, and, to him, appealingly beautiful in the trusting weakness of body which it betokened; but it was bright in the animation of some discussion with the engineer. She lifted her slim finger once and shook it, as a little child, up into his face. Evidently there was an easy understanding between the two, and Shan ground his teeth, since he expected next to see her strike his face with her fan or kerchief, as is the manner of many women much in love.

Fearing himself, he turned back into the woods.

Just then Pont struck the cold trail of a flock of birds. Round and round he went, "back-track—fore-track," till he led off slowly and meanderingly along near the road toward the cut. Reaching this, the dog ran in rude circles a few times, looked across the chasm and whined. Evidently the birds had walked that far and flown across.

The boy, baffled and discouraged, walked out upon the edge of the great cut, and noted that the wheel tracks of former vehicles upon the highway were yet plain to the very edge of the excavation, and so slight had been the rainfall that the spade-marks of the laborers were still sharp upon the slope. It was a fearful thing to see this lofty roadway, so plain and fresh, with that deep, dangerous pitfall in it yet, and the dense wall of growing trees hedging it to the last. He wished that he had an axe that he might fell a tree across it.

There were the two branch trails of the wagon road leading down to the Simpson farm upon the east side of the ridge; and they had joined ends at a "grade crossing" of the railroad, and had formed the new highway. But these two old extremities of the breach still stuck out at

each other away up here, like the unfinished false-work for an iron arch.

Shan stood for a moment on the edge, and, in his mood, enjoyed the terror of an imaginary plunge into this abyss upon a swift horse. God! how he would like to ride that racking demon of a filly over this; and he reached up and grasped his hot forehead with his hand.

On the west the clank of hammers sounded, clinching the last rivets of the bridge, and on the east were the double strokes on the last spikes driven beside the rails.

For a moment these sounds distracted him, but the remembrance of those happy faces riding up the hill came again, and he turned away and took the shells of small-shot—the number 8's—out of his gun, and slipped into the chambers some shells of goose-shot—"double oughts"—a few of which he always carried in hopes of larger game. With his hammers still at full cock—he started back!

Over on the other side, behind him, a little quail lifted its thin appealing pipe, and a brother answered!

It was his hunter's habit—the same which

had slain the owl — that stopped the boy ; and then, by association, the thoughts of his last experience with the gathering birds came to him and softened him. Pont, passing him, thrust his cold muzzle appealingly into his master's feverish palm. Shan turned, weak and trembling, and walked back toward the cut, his one purpose gone !

With another desperate resolve he hastened as he neared the pitfall. But he stopped suddenly upon its clayey, crumbling verge, and inching up, he stuck out his toes beyond it, and rocking his feet, played with his fate, as a cat might play with a mouse. He turned this way and that upon his heels until he was grinding the earth away so that the loosened pebbles and little clods rolled down the yellow slope, struck the shaly projections of the black slate, many feet below, and bounding out beyond the precipitous walls of rock, fell as far again, on further down, upon the solid road-bed.

Suddenly the dog seemed to feel that his master was trying to go over to where the birds were calling, and he darted forward by the boy, and pushed his fore feet far down the slope, whining as he began to slide. Instantly Shan,

grabbing him by the tail, snatched him back, just in time to save him.

Then the boy turned away, walked back a little and off a few steps into the woods, and dropped limply upon a log. Pont crept to him, meek with what he thought had been rebuke, and crouched and licked his hand, and turned his brown eyes — all full of love and adoration — up to the despairing human face that lay between its hands.

"I'm your God, Pont. *I wonder if I've got any?*"

And the dog looked down at something patterning on the leaves.

When Shan had glanced out upon Dolly and Linton driving along, she was saying to her companion that she knew Shan McBride was there somewhere in the woods. She had heard him shoot.

A hunter surely shows his character a little by the manner in which he pulls his second trigger — almost as in his autograph he shows his nervous peculiarities. Henry, Mildred, and Dolly all claimed to know Shan's double-shot as far as they could hear it, and the latter was

sure that when near by, she knew the single explosion of his twelve-bore Parker.

Linton was laughingly and skeptically bantering her about this and the squirrel episode, and she was talking vivaciously back, when Shan looked out at them from among the trees.

Further on they passed into the deeper woods, where the branches met overhead and the unfenced shrubs and tree-trunks came up tamely to the hubs of passing vehicles. Few such shady roads, where one seems to drive along a cool grotto into the very heart of nature, are left now in North Missouri.

There is no driving that compares with this — especially when air is right and the companion is congenial — to use a mild expression.

This was the last drive of these two congenial companions. To-morrow he would go home, and he was telling her how much her stimulating mind had helped him, and expressed the gratitude that every true teacher feels toward the true pupil — though Linton had never taught a day in his life.

Her head was hung in sorrow. With her nervous strength depleted by her sickness, and the dark overhanging sombreness of the deep

woods impressing her, this parting talk with her best friend seemed something awful; and she broke into a sob, whereupon Linton's conscience smote with a new fear. Had he been indiscreet in provoking Dolly's regard?

Just then they heard it thunder behind the wall of trees, and not being able to see out, they thought it best to turn back.

The road was very narrow, and Dolly looked up and smiled.

"Unh hunh," she said in her old teasing way, just to get herself out of her mood. "How are you going to turn around here, sir?" She brightened as a woman will at a man's possible discomfiture.

He pulled the filly over to the right, backed her, resisting and shaking her head, till the buggy was out a little way into a slight notch in the brush, then he pulled her over to the left and started home, with a twinkling smile of triumph at the girl.

But the sorrel did not like this way of turning. She had always had a field to swing around in, and this kind of thing had galled her. She had not learned to back yet and did not believe in it. Her religion was the religion

of going. So she ground her bit between her teeth as she trotted homeward in a sort of prance.

The long vista of trees looked doubly sad now to Dolly, and even Linton could not arouse himself from the solemn spell. He was gazing off on his side at the felted carpet of last year's dead leaves, which, under the thick saplings, held all vegetation down. Dolly was doing much the same thing. Now and then a dead red leaf fell whirling down into her lap. It was the silence of their sorrow.

Suddenly the filly swerved a little, at the sound of a squirrel's leap among the low boughs, and a hub scraped a sapling, while an overhanging limb swept Dolly's hat from her head, pulled her hair, and brushed noisily over the lowered buggy-top. She cried out a little at the shock and fright.

Her teeth set on the bit, the mad mare was off in desperation—with that old demoniacal dash for home in her every muscle. Before Linton could more than brace himself, she had passed the branch road leading to the house, and was running now toward the cut, along the old track, with fearful speed.

There was no chance to jump. The man rose and stretched himself against the lines, his face terrible in his fear, his hair streaming, his eyes starting.

The girl gave one awful scream and sat fascinated with fright as the clayey bank of the fearful cut flashed through the trees ahead of her.

She caught her breath to scream again as she saw the great ochrish stripe of the opposite wall broadening at her feet, and she shut her eyes when —

There was a loud explosion, a curling smoke among the trees, and the mare was down, a mass of quivering flesh between the shafts, while, one on either side, — flattened-like things shot out of something, — were Dolly and Linton, almost within the open jaws of the chasm !

The engineer lay a little while, he knew not how long ; but only shocked, he awoke at a soft moist touch — which seemed a touch of love — upon his face, and looking up saw Pont standing almost over him. He rose on his elbow, in a dazed way, and tried to look around him. In a flash it all came back. He tried to stagger to his feet, but sank back again with numbness in his legs. Hearing a slight noise on the other side,

he crawled round the head of the dead mare, and stopped, almost reverent at what he saw.

Over Dolly was bending Shan, with such a face! It awed Linton. She jerked a little and was still—then her body quivered. In an instant the boy's ear was on her heart, and then, with hope in his face, he arose, grabbed her hand and began to rub it. She stretched herself a little, her eyes opened, a faint smile shone a moment—and she was gone again. Linton crept nearer to help restore her, but—

She moved again, opened her eyes, smiled happily, laughed hysterically a little gurgle, and lifting a shaking hand to Shan's shoulder pulled him slightly down to her, and with her finger tips wiped the tear-drops from his cheek.

"Don't cry, you silly boy! I ain't hurt!"

Then, for a moment, it was darkness again to Dolly, but high noon in one heart above her, and the day dawning in another near.

They took the harness off the mare, dead with Shan's snapshot of double noughts behind her ear, and lifting Dolly into the buggy, they hauled her home—into the back-lot gate, up through the sheep-lot to the wood-pile fence.

Here the engineer got rather suddenly lame again, and limped the white lie that he would not speak, that Shan alone might support the slender form out of the buggy and into the house.

Linton looked back over the ridge, and the storm that threatened had gone around.

CHAPTER XXXV

“ If two lives join there is oft a scar ;
They are one and one with a shadowy third.”

— BROWNING.

“ That of our vices we can frame
A ladder, if we will but tread
Beneath our feet each deed of shame.”

— LONGFELLOW.

“ The world caught dreaming with the look of heaven.”

— LE GALLIENNE.

“ To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day.”

— DRYDEN.

As Shan started off, Linton asked him as a special favor to haul him and his belongings into town next day.

“ I want to talk with you, McBride.”

The boy was glad to go.

Next forenoon Linton spent packing. Just after dinner he ran over to tell Mildred Watkins good-by, and he told her of the affair of yesterday.

“ Oh, Shan came by last night. I always knew it would come out right. Do you go by rail or

boat? If it was me I should like to go by boat. I've heard Miss Hudson say the upper Mississippi is so beautiful."

"Upper Mississippi! Why, woman, Natchez is down the other way."

"But you go south by the way of ther north," she said mischievously.

"Say, Mildred, how did you know?"

"I saw a new, strange light in your face when Dolly blushed, that picnic day, at Shan's sugar and coffee proposition."

"Oh, Mildred, did you know that I was suffering?"

"Yes, I saw you put a pretty burden down one night."

"And take another up. Mildred, you could have helped me. What a fool I was!"

"Yes, I could. Rail or river?" she said again, banteringly, as she took the hand he offered.

"Rail. I'd go by telegraph if I could. Good-by!"

When he got back, Shan's wagon was waiting for him. He went in where Dolly, still weak from the shock, was lying on the lounge.

"Good-by, little girl!"

"Good-by, Mr. Linton. Oh, I do wish you

so well. Do you feel all right to-day? I saw you limping awfully at the gate yesterday evening."

"Say, that was a concession to your theory—the woodcock's strategy, you know. I wanted some one else to help you in."

She blushed, but she could have hugged him, and she looked it.

"I *did* know about the gun, didn't I?" with the old air of triumph.

"Yes. What if it had not been there?"

For a moment they lived over those terrible minutes, and they clasped each other's hands in the bond of their suffering. It seemed to draw them closer to each other. Her face brightened first.

"You owe him two debts, Mr. Linton, and—and I, one."

"I'm bankrupt, except in gratitude, but you are rich in more, you—Can't you pay him for us both, Dolly?"

And he stooped and aimed a kiss at a bruise upon her forehead, but she turned and stretched herself and caught it upon her lips.

"I don't—want any one—to—suf—suf—fuf—fuf—fuffer—any longer," she sobbed.

"Good-by," he said chokingly, his hand upon her hair as she turned her face into the pillow.

But the pillow only seemed to tremble in response.

He went softly out, and climbing into the spring-seat by the side of Shan, who had not come into the house, he glanced with a shudder at the great gash in the ridge. Over it two vultures were circling, and dipping, lower, lower, lower, in alternating swoops!

The ride to town was rather stiff. Linton wanted to talk all the time about his debt to Shan, but the boy did not care to recall it.

In some way Shan could not yet shake off his fear of this splendid fellow. Then there were other things.

He saw Linton express his instruments to some point in the south, but when they went down to the station, the engineer called rather loudly for a ticket to a *certain point in Minnesota*. They both laughed, and Shan blushed scarlet, as Linton passed it to him to read.

"We've been a pair of fools, Shan, blind as bats."

"One of us has been worse'n that."

A long silence.

"Say, Mr. Linton, do you know I'm awful glad I saved you — and — and — *didn't lose yer again.*"

He had come near saying, "let yer stay saved."

"Well, I have some reasons to rejoice myself."

"There wuz times when I wasn't glad."

"I know it, old fellow. God knows I never meant to pain you."

"Yes, yes, and — and God knows some other things. He knows best all round after all, I guess."

They took a turn or two up and down the platform, while the smoke of the coming train (not on the C. and D.) showed over the tree tops southward.

"Say, Linton, did that filly have a mission?"

"Why, yes, I guess," and he shuddered. "Pont too, *I* think, of course. He helped save me once, you remember?"

"Yes — and — and — he saved me once, too — and some other people."

Linton looked a little puzzled.

"Shan, that was a splendid thing to do with bird-shot. That's an elegant gun of yours."

The boy blanched a moment, and trembled.
No compliment to his skill had ever cut like
that.

The train was whistling for the station.

"Say, tell Miss Winnie for me," he said huskily, "that misplaced bad is good sometimes; that—that saving others—even a dog—is salvation often ter yerself. Tell her that *I* send you to her saved—*more than doubly saved*—won't you? that *I* send you to her with my grateful wishes for your mutual happiness."

"God bless you, boy! Your message helps me."

"Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

And in the same spot where he had left Miss Winnie, this boy again looked into Linton's face through tears, as the steaming engine swept by and threw its warm breath upon their clasped hands.

As he jolted home that late October afternoon, he took the prairie route, he knew not why, for it was longer, unless it was that he might see out better. The world was widening to his view.

Before him the sun was setting in a haze of purpling, coppery clouds, out through the breaks of which long streamers of yellow light stretched across the southern sky. Behind him another sun, less brilliant, but quite similar and evident, seemed to lie beyond another purpling mist; and it sent its streamers up westward, till like interlocking fingers spread in friendly reach, the two sets of sky-stripes, grasping at each other, almost met. It was a scene not infrequent upon our Missouri prairies—this reach across the heavens of the unreal for the real—the glory of one horizon reflected at the other—the day-death set back to life again at the dawning place, in a flash.

The boy took it as a good omen, though he knew not why, except that it seemed a kind of good-will grip of the east and west around by the way of the south, a sort of earth-shine hurled back at heaven as though light were defying gloom. Gradually it faded, and an autumn chill came on with the softened twilight.

As he glanced back later, to see if the mock sun were gone, he saw a light that he had never seen before, blazing like a new "star in the east," away down the prairie stretch!

The cool nights were rendering necessary little fires in hearths and stoves, which blazed out cosily the domestic comforts as he passed; and away across the prairies there were glimmerings of lamps, interrupted by figures circling round them, till their flashes spelt out "Home" all over the broad, peaceful land. Lord! he would have one of these himself some day; and a certain face should be the light of it.

But this—this light away down there—it was none of these. Why, it was nearer now!

In some way he thought of the date of the month, and this was his birthday—his twenty-first. He had not thought of that before, and he felt in it the thrill of another life. It was not that he had been restrained with a hard hand, for he had not; but it was grand to feel the freedom of advancing years—and their privileges.

As he approached the railroad near the Simpson farm, where the surveying party had been halted, there was a rumble, a sudden light shone round about him, and the first regular train over the new road swept by him, on through the cut.

In the throb of all the new impulses that came into him then, he felt almost like crying

out to his own exulting soul, "What wilt thou have me do?"

Just then Henry Simpson galloped past him, spoke a greeting, and was turning into the home lane.

Shan shouted after him:—

"Say, Henry."

"Yeh-uh."

"Tell Dolly that, after supper, I'll be over *at you-all's house!*"

* * * * *

Late that night, as Shan, returning from the Simpson's, neared his home, he saw Pont sitting on the low stiles beside the gate, barking listlessly, yet half-wailingly, as if hope were dead and life had no other object but a bark. The pathos of the sound affected the boy; he thought of their last communion at the cut, whereupon the remembrance of all that was then within his heart swept an agony of remorse into his conscience, as if his impulses had been deeds.

As he glanced upward, whither the dog also seemed to be looking, and gazed a moment at the moon, haloed with a faint mysterious ring and crowned with a nimbus burr, his gratitude

bared his heart and bowed his head to that UPLIFTING, OBLIGATING SOMETHING which his penitent, hoping spirit seemed to touch in the Great Beyond, behind the stars.

When he reached the step, the old dog, silent now and patient, was beating with his tail a mild tattoo of welcome upon the hard planks, and was lifting first one paw, then the other, that he might, without rebuke, more surely put out the proper one in a greeting hand-shake. It was a trick which he had been taught to do, and had done hundreds of times before; and to-night there came up, as ever, in subdued whine, in look and reach, and moist murmur of closing chops, the old, old, unanswered supplication that he might be allowed once to lick his master's face and yet stand approved in his master's heart!

The hand hesitated a moment as it grasped the proffered paw; then, "Yes, I'm your God, Pont," the human said again, and he stooped and bent his cheek to the soft, warm, worshipping touch of the beast beneath him; and straightening up, he lifted his face an instant to the Eternity above him, and walked slowly into the house.



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